You're starving, darling.

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You're starving, darling.

by Angelic_Disaster

Summary

In his house in Wolf Trap, Virginia, surrounded by well-cared-for and well-loved dogs, resides the well-known, early retired, and committed to solitude psychiatrist: Dr. Will Graham.

For the last couple of years, Dr. Will Graham has not heard a single word from Jack Crawford, but when a new serial killer starts creating problems for the FBI's new bloodhound, Jack Crawford is forced to come knocking on Dr. Graham's door.

Soon Dr. Graham discovers that Hannibal Lecter is far more interesting than he expected.

Interest quickly spirals into obsession, and obsession develops a compulsion to pull that dark thread that keeps the agent's person suit together until Will can find what truly lies underneath.

Trope: Role Reversal.

Notes

Prologue and first chapter together! Have fun people, and see you all next week!

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In his house in Wolf Trap, Virginia, surrounded by well-cared-for and well-loved dogs, resides the well-known, early retired, and committed to solitude psychiatrist: Dr. Will Graham.

His phone almost never rings, so when it does, the ringtone startles the dogs.

“Hello?”

“Will, it’s been a long time. This is Jack Crawf–”

Will Graham, as soon as he hears the voice of his old acquaintance, does what every sane man with the barest minimum of self-preservation does the moment Jack Crawford calls: He picks up a hammer and smashes the phone into a useless brick.

“Nope.”

Will throws the phone inside the trash bin under his desk and resumes the work on his lure. The weather has been nice lately, he’ll probably go fishing tomorrow.

[x]

Days later, when Will Graham is busy again at his desk on the upper level of his house, this time reading a book, he hears the scratch of car tires on his pebbled driveway. He looks down through the window to find an FBI SUV car, and so, Will Graham does what any sane person with the barest minimum of self-preservation should do when Jack Crawford comes to their door carrying a manila folder full of pictures of dead bodies in his robust hand: He opens the door, lets the dogs out to the porch to bark and growl at the intruder and aims his deceased father’s old shotgun at Jack Crawford’s chest.

“Unless you’re carrying a warrant in that folder, I want you gone from my property right now, Jack.”

“Will, listen–”

“Get out.”

Will disengages the safety of the gun and the sound of it stuns Jack into silence.

“This could save lives–” Jack tries to argue, but Will cuts him again with a sharp whistle.

“Ellie,” Will calls, and the smallest dog of the seven chirps angrily at Jack, attempting to nip at Jack’s leg and making the agent take a step back. “Winston,” he calls again, and Winston, who is not the smallest nor the biggest but the most protective, goes in front of Will, paws firmly planted on the porch and eyes fixated on Jack.

Winston growls. His snout wrinkles when he shows his teeth, and the dog curves his body into an attack position.

Jack takes another step back, fully leaving the porch.

“Don’t make me call B-u-s-t-e-r,” Will spells, nodding at the small terrier. “He is not the biggest, but he plays dirty and he *will* bite, and he *won’t* let go.”

Jack presses his lips into a thin line at the threat, brows furrowed as he capitulates snapping the folder in the air.

“Very well. Good afternoon, Will.”

It’s only a momentary victory, Will knows that. Jack hasn’t accepted defeat, and probably won’t, ever. Life has taught Will that. One battle won against Jack Crawford only postpones the end of the war. Jack will come back soon enough.

But as the SUV retreats, Will lowers the rifle and gets back to his dogs. He has earned himself at least another day of peace.

[x]

Jack is also a man more or less sane with some sense of self-preservation, so, the third time he tries to reach for Will, he doesn’t try to call or come in person. Instead, he sends someone else in his place. Someone that Will would hesitate shooting on sight.

Her name is Applesauce and she is *gorgeous*. She even allows Will to bury his face in her fur and she wiggles her tail happily when he pets her.

Alana comes along with her because, well, dogs sadly can’t convince Will to help the FBI. Will would have preferred that Applesauce had come alone, but that’s his luck.

“Can I come in?” Alana asks ruefully, another hint that she is so clearly sent by Jack.

“No.” Will answers plainly with a smile on his face that is still buried in Applesauce’s fur. “And you can’t tell me what Jack wants either.”

Alana smiles proudly at him, but Will knows that she still won’t desist. There’s a hint of guilt in the way she carries herself, making her shoulders smaller and brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. Must be something important then.

Still, it's a 'no' from Will. If she wanted to ask for a favor she should have helped him more while the FBI tried to put him behind bars.

"Can I tell you what I want instead?"

That catches Will's attention. Must be *really* important then. He hasn't been looking lately at the news, and Lounds hasn't sent any of her tabloid articles for him to check.

"Perhaps…" he ventures, peeking at Alana with one eye open, still hugging her dog.

"The Minnesota Shrike. Have you heard of it?" she says tentatively.

Doesn't ring a bell, but it sounds like a moniker that Lounds would have come up with. Must not be a very complicated serial killer if she hasn't asked for his input yet.

It makes the fact that Jack and Alana are coming to ask for his help a lot more curious.

And speaking of Alana, she looks like she wants to take a step forward but she resists. She may be expecting that Will will bite a chunk of her if she tries to. He supposes it's a fair assessment on her part, he hasn't had a lot of interaction with fellow humans since he stopped working a few years back.

(And no, Freddie Lounds doesn't count as a fellow human. She counts as a headache in any case. A useful one, contrary to Will's normal headaches and the headache that Jack Crawford represented, so that's a point in her favor.)

"No, and I don't care."

"Good," Alana answers proudly with a smile. "The current profiler–"

"Jack's new punching box," Will corrects.

Alana sighs, more amused than irritated.

"The current profiler is having a hard time with it. The FBI could use your insight."

Will makes a face and a disbelieving hum. *Don't they always?* The corners of Alana's mouth curve upwards. Her blue eyes sparkle.

"Jack promises he won't make you go into the field."

"Jack's promises are feeble at best," he refutes as he stands up, brushing the dirt from his knees. A clear show of him considering the idea of heading back home.

"The profiler is a friend of mine. Please?" Alana asks quickly, stopping him in his tracks. She may not be cursed with Will's empathy, but she catches on his sour expression. Will has a huge resting bitch-face after all, it's difficult to miss. "I'm going on a trip next month to a psychology convention, I'll need someone to take care of my girl," she adds, gesturing with her head to Applesauce.

It's a desperate attempt to make Will at least consider helping the FBI. It could have worked. But the case has quickly piqued his interest, something about it doesn't sit right and it's munching at the back of his brain.

Still, he will put out a show for Alana's sake. Let her believe she did something.

“Alright. I’m sold,” Will groans, rolling his head and wiping the smirk from his face with his hand. He points a finger sharply in Alana’s direction as an afterthought, though she doesn’t seem faced by it. She’s smiling far too wide. “I’ll go *once* . No field. And I won’t be nice.”

“Believe me, Will, nobody will be expecting you to be nice,” she laughs, and it’s quickly contagious, even if he doesn’t want to.

It dies as quickly as it has begun, and Alana still stands in front of him, her posture tense as she brushes the same strand of hair behind her ear once again in that nervous tic she has. Her smile is shy when she speaks. “You look good.”

She oozes guilt from all her pores, and maybe some regret for the broken friendship and missed could have beens.

Will doesn’t care about it. Never actually cared. But it’s good that she does, works perfectly for him. Next time the FBI is onto him, Alana’s guilt will make her become the first one on the line of fire to protect him and voluntarily ignore all the proof of his guilt.

“Yeah, well, it’s needed more than two serial killers to put me down,” Will answers with a shrug. “My practice on the other hand…" he trails off with a gesture of his hand, waiting for the moment Alana drops her eyes.

As expected, she lowers her gaze, and her smile dims.

"But doesn’t matter," Will resumes quickly, brushing the matter away with a disinterested wave of his hand. "The lawsuit I put the FBI through gives me more money than I could spend in two lifetimes. Oh, that reminds me, tell Jack my fee will be double, you know what, make it triple than last time.”

Alana laughs again, louder and more honestly.

“Don’t worry, I got you.” She looks at him for a long moment until Applesauce starts pawning at her leg. Her cheeks blush pink when she looks at Will, and she quickly lowers her eyes again, petting the dog to make her hands useful. “Thank you. Really.”

“Sure, whatever,” Will shrugs again, trying to present himself as more relaxed and friendly. It’s been a while since he had some fun. He will have to look up The Minnesota Shrike and call Lounds once Alana is gone, but that barely will entertain him. Instead, he goes for what he is truly curious about. “So, what’s your friend’s name? Jack’s new profiler.”

“His name is Hannibal. Hannibal Lecter.”

Chapter End Notes

A quick promo moment: I always post the small sneak peeks of my next long fics on my coffee, so if you're interested in checking sneak peeks or other fics of mine you can find my coffee and all my socials in my LinkTree ☕

Thank you for reading. Lots of love, Angel ♡

A problem with taste

Chapter Notes

> Just a little warning: I treat Hannibal's cannibalism and vegetarianism as an eating disorder influenced by his PTSD. If Eating Disorder mentions triggers you, maybe you should avoid this fic. Eating Disorders won't be discussed in detail, but Hannibal's Eating Disorder is a central a plot point of his character arc.

"Damn, looks like the Mall of America in here," Will comments with a whistle, looking at the row of pictures pinned to the wall. 8 girls. Same hair color. Same eye color. Roughly the same age, height, weight. *What is it about all these girls?* He thinks. He doesn't even finish the thought when his own brain supplies: *It's not about all of these girls. It's about one of them.* He hums to himself and keeps his thoughts, also, to himself. At least for now. "That's a lot of wind-chaffed skin."

The agent sitting in front of Jack's desk tenses at Will's words.

"Tasteless," he mutters into his coffee.

Hannibal Lecter. Will has spent the last couple of days looking him up. He's *very* good at his job, and very dedicated. That's not good for Will, but it's curious. Will has spent only three minutes in front of the pictures and already has a theory forming. Agent Lecter has a pretty large amount of arrests on his back, his file is also incredibly heavy with published papers in forensics – the length of almost two full novels, and a decent amount in criminal psychology. It's a wonder he is struggling with a case so simple.

Will wonders. His brain is vibrating. His blood is rushing through his ears. It has been a while since he has had something interesting to do. Hannibal Lecter feels like he is something interesting to do.

"You have a problem with taste?" Will jabs at the man, disappointed when he gets no response.

"Will," Jack reprimands, and Will is just as quick as the man to snarl back. He is helping, not working.

"Dr. Graham," Will corrects sharply, returning to his sour humor. "We are not friends, *Agent Crawford."*

Jack's perpetual frown deepens at the way Will addresses him. Jack is a man used to barking orders around and pulling at his dogs' leashes unnecessarily. Will won't have it, not with

himself. If Jack wants to bark at his agents, he can, but the moment he raises his voice at him Will won't bark, he'll go straight to bite at his throat.

Jack sighs and his frown doesn't disappear. At this point, is a surprise the man still can manage to make any other kind of facial expression. Will swears that one day Jack is going to frown so hard his face is going to lock like that forever.

"Dr. Graham," Jack amends, another momentary capitulation. He gestures to the chair in front of his desk, at Agent Lecter's right. "Please. This is agent Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal, this is Doctor Will Graham."

"The Dr. Graham?" Agent Lecter asks, not curiously. He is not curious. *That's* curious. He asks out of politeness. There's also an honest edge of surprise to his voice. He knows Will.

But to be fair, everybody at the FBI *knows* who Doctor Will Graham is.

"Yes, the one who sued the FBI for damages, and false incarceration, and the stress that comes with it, and the damage to my mental health, take your pick. Jack also has a cease and desist order from me, and also a restraining order that he is not obeying," Will comments gleefully, raising one finger with each one.

He goes to the desk but doesn't sit on his designated chair. He pours himself a coffee and sips at it standing, resting his hips at Jack's desk. If there's something in his life that Will misses less than the FBI is the FBI's coffee. Damn, that shit tastes like dirt.

Will smiles, looking at the agent over the rim of his styrofoam cup and under the rim of his own glasses. "If you want some advice, Agent Lecter, you should quit and do the same. I can give you the number of my lawyer if you want."

Agent Lecter makes a strained smile out of politeness. He is handsome, Will wouldn't mind giving him his number along with his lawyer's.

"Ah, so that's where I knew your name," Lecter says, his voice just as strained as his smile. Will is already grating on his nerves. "Though I'm sure I knew you from your work. I admire your paper on exclusion and isolation."

"Read the psychiatrists' magazine, do you?"

"Often, actually."

Such a pretentious fucking ass.

Will takes great joy in grating anyone's nerves, especially Agent Lecter's nerves. Lecter also seems to take joy grating into Will's. The joke's on him though, Will is into that. It's been a *long* fucking while since Will found someone that makes him feel anything but boredom.

"Also, I must say, I have great respect for you, Dr. Graham," Lecter says with a more honest, and actually quite annoying smile. He is proud of himself and fucking smug, Will can tell just by the line of his shoulders. He is about to make a jab of his own and disguise it as politeness. "You have a great deal of… arrests, for a civilian."

Will huffs a disbelieving laugh, turning to him.

“Ah, yeah, very nice of you to call them arrests, the FBI calls them *'the accidents',*” Will says, rolling his eyes. “And the trick pony,” he adds, tapping at his own temple.

Agent Lecter frowns at that, his smug smile wiped from his handsome face when he turns fully to face Jack.

“We don’t need a magic trick.”

“I don’t do magic, I observe,” Will refutes. He takes off his useless glasses and Agent Lecter turns to him, and when Will meets his eyes–

Oh, when Will meets his eyes.

Hello darkness, my old friend, Will sings amused to himself. *This is going to be* ***so much*** *fun.*

The moment doesn’t last more than a handful of seconds, but that’s enough because Lecter doesn’t hesitate to hold Will’s gaze dead on.

A huge mistake on his part. The worst type of hubris is to look at the sun and expect not to have your eyeballs melt.

Will gives him a cursory glance, a blink, and takes notes of all his findings.

An insufferable amount of ego, but that’s how it is with psychopaths – *oh– a psychopath of his caliber in the FBI? How did you pass the screening? – Jack’s moral compass. Use one to catch another.*

Or maybe you’re just that *good at hiding yourself?*

God complex? *No.* Savior complex. *Weird for a psychopath.*

Relentless.

The trauma though, that’s heavy on his shoulders. No. *Where is it stored?* Is not the mind, the mind is clean. Compartmentalized into the suggestion of an OCD. *Where is the trauma stored?* Is not the hands. Lecter has artist’s hands – he is an artist. Piano? *Close but no.* Probably something similar with a different name, something high-societal like his clothes. Too formal for an FBI agent, not formal enough as he wishes to be. He compensates for the clothes he cannot wear with the way he carries himself. *Where’s the trauma stored?* Mouth. No. *Where–*

“Sorry, I’ll just,” Will says. He takes a step back as he compartmentalizes everything to analyze later. He returns to the furthest wall and presses his body against it as much as he can. More than he should. He does it in the most exaggerated way he can, going as far as to roll on the wall and press his chest and face to it. He thinks about raising his leg like a cartoon bug hitting the windshield of a car, but that's probably going a bit too far.

“What the hell are you doing Will?” Jack barks, and just for the sake of the joke, Will lets it pass.

“I’m making space for your agent’s ego, Jack, it’s taking all the room.”

Lecter makes an aborted noise of offense, and he turns at Jack like an older brother would turn to his father when the younger one is being an annoying piece of shit. Like Will is and enjoys being.

“Did that bother you, Agent Lecter? Certainly it wasn’t the comment about your ego. I’m sure you’re plenty aware of its size,” Will jabs again and he receives a sharp glare for it.

“I abhor rudeness,” Lecter tells him, pouting with his upper lip.

“Oh, *darlin’,”* Will drawls, patting the man’s shoulder and not missing the way Lecter tenses at the touch and blushes when the word tilts with Will's Louisiana accent.

Will files the findings away, and compartmentalizes them.

Will knows he is a handsome man, it makes up for his awful personality. He still resists winking at the Agent, no need to have a talk with Human Resources yet, there will be time for that later.

“It’s going to be a nightmare for you to work with me then, agent.”

Lecter’s eyes widen, and he turns back to Jack even faster than before with his plush lips parted open. He doesn’t get to say anything before Will interrupts him again.

“You didn’t know? Damn Jack, you really need to treat your dogs better, at least warn them when a visit is coming,” Will laughs as he shakes his head. He goes to the desk again to deposit his empty styrofoam cup and grab his coat. “You two have fun, guys,” Will says as he takes his leave. “I’ll go see the bodies.”

[x]

The bodies offered no insight. They were too old. They offered less than the girls’ pictures on Jack’s office wall. The pictures of the crime scenes were not much better. They were snapshots, stolen pieces of an incomplete puzzle without the picture on the cardboard box.

Wil’s best chance would be a fresh crime scene. His second best shot would be Agent Lecter telling him what he can remember about the crime scenes, and which are his theories. That at least could help Will draw a sketch of how the puzzle would look once it is finished.

The pendulum swings suddenly, only once, crashing against the right wall of Will’s skull. *Artists’ hands.* The nice, expensive pencils that Lecter had in his breast pocket. The traces of

graphite on his thumb. Agent Lecter draws. How nice. A nice, tasteful, and inoffensive little pastime. Just like playing the piano.

Will looks at his phone as he walks through Quantico's halls. Piano? No. Pipe organ? Doesn't fit in a house, so another no. Keyboard? Absolutely not. Harpsichord? Will can't write that one without using Google, so it's probably that.

Will finds Agent Lecter one hour after he left Jack's office.

Lecter is sitting in the cafeteria, eating his lunch alone. Weird for a man like him, he seems very sociable. Less weird for a psychopath. Lecter looks completely at ease with his homemade lunch.

Where is the trauma stored? Is stored in the mouth? No. Will brushes that thought away. Quantico's food is just disgusting. The times he came to consult years ago he ate only once in the cafeteria and then went to the nearest McDonald's he could find.

Will takes notice of more things as he walks towards the man's table.

He looks old-money. Not only in his clothes but in the line of his spine, a silver spoon stuck deep inside his ass. Savior complex again, the only reason why he would take this job. He could be in the front of a class if he was hungry for academics, or holding a scalpel if he was hungry for adrenaline.

He could be holding a knife.

Something gnaws at Will's brain.

Where is the trauma stored? Is not the mouth. What's up with you and the hunger?

The pendulum doesn't know where to swing. Will takes another step and puts a pin on the hunger, red thread hanging loosely from it and not connected to anything yet.

Are you hungry? You look like a man who has a strict diet. Do you have a strict diet? An eating disorder perhaps?

Lecter is a psychopath, but not a dangerous one. It would take a very stupid psychopath or a huge adrenaline junkie psychopath to put himself so directly into the FBI's spotlight. Too dangerous for a dangerous one. Good enough for an inoffensive psychopath. The most perfect line of work for an intelligent psychopath with a savior complex.

Agent Lecter raises his head when Will enters his field of vision. He also does a great job of hiding how much he wants to glare at Will, and keeps a civil demeanor, only raising his chin.

Will isn't going to apologize, but he is going to offer a truce. He doesn't want to be here, and Agent Lecter doesn't want him to be here. They can agree on that. They can work with it and into an agreement. The quicker Will comes up with something that can help the FBI, the quicker he can leave and they both can be happy.

Will isn't planning on apologizing, but he is planning on not being *too* rude. But then he catches sight of Lecter's homemade vegetarian ensemble of lunch and the tube of vitamins and iron supplements at his side, and he can't possibly *not* be rude. Is like asking a fish not to swim, or a dog not to bark, or a psychopath to not have an ego bigger than his head.

Or, like asking Doctor Will Graham not to be an annoying, rude piece of shit.

"So you *do* have a problem with taste," Will greets with a smile.

The pendulum swings.

The trauma is not stored in the mouth. The trauma is stored in the stomach.

Do you have a problem with taste? Clearly you do. It's all about taste. It's not animals that you care about. Why would a psychopath care for animals?

Taste.

Taste.

Taste.

What did you taste?

Meat.

What's wrong with the meat?

There's something wrong with the meat.

Will freezes.

There's something wrong with the meat.

The pendulum swings.

Will places both hands on the table. Takes his eyes away from Agent Lecter's. They're interfering. There was something wrong with the meat. With the girl. The body that was found. There was something wrong with the meat of that girl. *Meat? Flesh. No. Meat.*

Hunger. The loose red thread of Lecter's profile waves. Where does it connect?

Hunger. What was wrong with your meat?

"Doctor Graham?" Lecter's voice doesn't carry worry, but he puts a hand on his shoulder. Savior complex.

Focus.

"There's something wrong with the meat," Will utters, out of breath, shrugging Lecter's touch away from him. False pity is just as annoying as real pity. He wishes Agent Lecter's

supplements were aspirins. “Call Jack.”

“Dr. Graham you need to calm down and tell me what’s happening.”

Will raises his head and locks his gaze with the maroon eyes of the profiler.

The pendulum stops. It doesn’t know where to swing.

The profiles clash.

Savior complex. Eating disorder. No. It's the taste. The eating disorder is a trauma response. Eating disorder as a part of his PTSD. It wasn’t meat. It was flesh.

Cannibal.

No.

Yes?

No. The Minnesota Shrike is a cannibal.

Will shakes his head and closes his eyes. He puts Lecter’s profile in a box and stores it to read it later.

Focus on the Shrike.

Is about meat, and there was something wrong with it.

Where was the love? What about the love?

Will groans and moves *love* to the box of Lecter’s profile. Takes it out. Breaks it in half and puts one part in the Shrike’s box and the other in Lecter’s.

“Call Jack, now, there is something wrong with the meat,” Will orders and Lecter grabs him by the shoulders, forcing his strength into Will’s smaller frame to sit him down.

That does shake Will into a stupor, holding the brakes of his brain. He discovers something about himself too. *New kink unlocked: Being manhandled.*

“What’s happening?” Lecter demands, *damn fucking psychopaths.*

“He is eating them, the girls,” Will tells him, sexual awakening put down aside. “That’s why they can’t find the bodies. He is a cannibal.”

Lecter freezes and turns grey. He clenches his fists into Will’s jacket. He looks sick.

Cannibal. Taste. There was something wrong with your meat too. Will grabs that information and fits it roughly and hurriedly into Lecter’s box. Takes hold of the red thread of hunger.

“The body, the last one, the one that was found. There was something wrong with the meat, call Jack, now,” Will tells him as he stands up clumsily. “Let’s go to the lab.”

[x]

In the center of the room lays the body of Elise Nichols, the last known victim of The Minnesota Shrike. Around her are, in this specific order: Beverly Katz (whom Will gets along with so much that he once shared a beer with her), Jimmy Price (whom Will knows has a twin brother and Will couldn't care less but he still has to live with that knowledge after having to sit with the man on a car ride of more than four hours) and Bryan Zeller (God bless him because Will can't stand him).

Around them, close enough to see the body but not enough to obstruct their work, stand Agent Hannibal Lecter and Doctor Will Graham.

People's quirks and tells always bleed onto Will, he is quick to catch them and mimic them against his own will. Psychopaths' personalities are always the most abrasive, even one as tamed as Lecter's.

Will tries to put as much distance between them both as he can. Where Lecter stays upright and tense with his hands clasped in front of him, Will lays against the wall, arms crossed over his chest.

"You were right," Lecter comments softly, releasing a deep breath as the team works on Elise Nichols' body. "There was something wrong with the meat, she had liver cancer."

Zeller's head perks up at that, turning to face them, eyes wide with surprise. "She does."

"I'm always right," Will says without any hint of humility. He actually is always right. He purses his lips and looks at the agent's neck. "How did you know?"

Agent Lecter rolls his shoulders, a useless attempt to release some tension. He looks sick. Will feels sudden tension bleeding into his own shoulders that he wants to release. Lecter is bleeding into him, he reminds himself what he feels is not his own need and instead Will taps his fingers instead of rolling his shoulders.

"I can smell it."

"You can smell liver cancer?" Will asks, watching how Lecter tilts his head to the side, not looking at Will but making sure to show he is speaking to him.

"Yes. I can also smell your atrocious aftershave."

Will suppresses a chuckle but not a smile. It's the perfect chance to be himself, annoying and rude, and separate himself from Lecter's influence.

"I like the ship it has in the bottle. I have plenty of them, I can give you one if you want."

Lecter doesn't laugh at the jab, but his eyes wrinkle at the corners, and his upper lip twitches. It almost seems as if they're getting along.

"I would prefer if you didn't."

There's humor in the agent's voice. His accent is heavy, heavier than Will's half-buried one. Lecter's body is still tense, but he puts more weight on his right leg, making him sag slightly towards Will. A certain kind of truce, a show of respect. He is open for conversation. Will thinks he is almost begging for something to pull him away from this case.

Will is happy to oblige and learn a little more.

"What else do you smell on me?"

"An extraordinary amount of dogs, but I will confess that I had the help of all the different colors of fur that you have on your clothes," Lecter brags, as any psychopath does when given the chance. He turns his face to Will then, looking at him over his shoulder. There's a spark in his dark eyes, a certain curiosity. "If you were closer, I could tell you what you had for breakfast."

Will raises his brows, less than by the confession and more because he has the bare notion that the man is flirting with him. Not that Will would say no to that development, though maybe is a little bit unsanitary with, you know, the dead body not too far away from them. Of course, not as if Will is against sex with a little bit of murder on the side.

Will takes a step away from the wall, then another to stand in front of the agent. The slightest pink color rises to the agent's sharp cheekbones. Will wonders if it's considered unsanitary to flirt in front of dead bodies, then, and because he is a little shit, Will blows his breath into Lecter's face.

Lecter smiles in a way that suggests that Will is being amusing rather than unforgivably rude and abrasive. Lecter abhors rudeness, but Will's seems to amuse him. The agent raises an eyebrow, and his chin along with it. A strained smile grazes his lips and gives Will a challenging look.

"Coffee and gastric juices. You didn't eat."

"Damn, you're good," Will says with a smile, watching how another smaller one graces the agent's lips. "I'll eat tuna salad next time I see you, one garlic for each dog, they're seven, by the way."

Lecter makes another face, this one of scandalization. Lecter gives the impression that he would be clutching his pearls if he had any. Will wonders if it's because of the number of dogs or because he believes Will's threat.

Agent Lecter shakes his head a moment after, and locks of hair fall over his eyes. He dismisses Will's antics with a demure smile. He shouldn't. Will only half-joked about the tuna salad, now he wants to mean it, poke the man further. Pull at the stitches of the person suit he wears and see what's underneath.

Lecter looks back at the body of Elise Nichols and the tension returns to the muscles of his face. He looked soft a moment ago and it startles Will how small the agent's expressions are. Will barely noticed them until they disappeared.

"How did you know he was a cannibal?" Lecter asks solemnly.

"Because you don't eat meat," Will answers plainly. Usually, people look at him weirdly when he gives answers like that. He actually never stops to think before giving those kinds of answers and mostly he doesn't care, is not his fault his brain makes jumps he can't explain.

Lecter doesn't look at him, instead, he flinches and takes a sharp inhale that hints Will's pendulum into action.

Will grabs it before it can crash into his skull. Saves that information in a file and in Lecter's box. He will look at it closely later with the rest. For now, he decides to explain himself to the best of his ability.

"You didn't eat meat, so I thought *'What's wrong with the meat?'* like, you know, in general, just to be a smartass, and then it hit me. Call it an *eureka* moment, or my little magic trick."

"Will is amazing," Beverly says, inserting herself into the conversation. "We worked together a couple of times, his brain makes Olympic jumps. We used to tie a rope to his feet and hang him from the ceiling, shake him until he came up with something. It's like shaking a magic 8-ball."

"You keep your bondage fantasies far away from me, Katz," Will says, joining her in the joke.

Lecter, on the other hand, doesn't seem to be interested in it. He looks at Will again, the curiosity is still there, but all traces of playfulness are gone.

"I see," Lecter says. He straightens his spine and squares his shoulders, and *oh, poor thing,* his ego is bruised. *Boohoo.* He turns to Will fully, hands still firmly clasped before him, and bows his head. "It was very… educational to see you, Dr. Graham."

Will rolls his eyes and adds *a strong Japanese figure of power* into Lecter's file.

"Don't worry Agent Lecter, I'm sure you would have come to that conclusion on your own soon enough without my help."

Or maybe not, Will thinks.

This case has the potential to break you. You're actually terrified of it. How far will you bend before you snap? Is your savior complex holding you together or pulling you apart?

The pendulum swings.

Cannibal. Savior complex. Eating disorder. PTSD. They slot perfectly together. The puzzle has Hannibal Lecter's face.

Who couldn't you save? Who is stored in your stomach?

"Don't take it personally," Will tells him, nudging playfully at Lecter's shoulder with his. "It's just my brain, lots of empathy receptors."

Lecter nods. He tilts his head to the side like a curious cat. He clenches his fists in front of him and pulls his body tight.

There's a desire in his eyes. Not something like hunger, nor as base as lust. But there's something clawing. Something that tries to push the agent towards Will, and Lecter is trying to resist with all his might.

"Must be quite annoying," he comments with a strained voice.

He is trying to pull back, but something in him is begging, howling – *eureka.*

Could you see me?

"Yes." Will smiles and bites his tongue. This case just turned out far more interesting than he had expected. Perhaps Will can consult more than once.

Welcoming Gift

Will has spent this week investigating as much of Hannibal Lecter as he could put his hands on. He even invited Freddie Lounds to his house to ask her for help. He even called Alana.

The file grows bigger.

Born in Lithuania, a large hole of nothing in his youth until he was a teenager in France. A large hole of nothing, empty and gaping like an orphanaged kid's stomach. Perfect grades, only one misdemeanor, scholarships. Teenage years spent in France, the trek between youth and adulthood spent in Italy, and then a scholarship into America. Almost a hundred articles written in forensics and psychology. Less than five years working for the FBI and already has a file with more arrests than agents with two decades on their shoulders. Not a single known romantic relationship, not a single relative alive.

A psychopath with a Savior Complex. Cannibalism as an Eating Disorder. A vegetarian, an inoffensive person suit. Forced to solitude and committed to loneliness. A lover of the arts, not a mask. He is a sensitive type of psychopath.

The pendulum swings.

Will writes another note on The Minnesota Shrike's file: A sensitive psychopath.

No wonder why Hannibal is struggling so much with this case. He is watching a mirage of what he could have been. There's a gap in Hannibal's past, a nebulous spot that Will can't reach, can't see. Something happened somewhere in the timeline that made him tailor this person suit and not a different one.

Will marks the hole in Hannibal's childhood with a pin.

"Here is when you ate for the first time in your life," he mumbles to the empty place of his office. A smaller second bedroom that he turned into a study on the upper floor of his house. It holds his desk and his lures, some newspaper pages that have his name on them, and a corkboard full of pins and threads, but not a single image or word. The information is in Will's head.

Will goes to the yellow pin that marks Italy and grabs his phone. Lounds sent him a letter of recommendation written by one Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi. *Hannibal Lecter has been of remarkable help to solve–*

Not Italy then.

Will goes back in time, to the red pin that marks France. It has to be there. Lived with his uncle and his uncle's wife. Murasaki. *Strong **female** Japanese role model.*

Sensitive psychopaths. The Minnesota Shrike loves the girls. No. Loves *the* girl.

Whoever Hannibal ate, he loved them. He can love. Or he thinks he can love. He loves like psychopaths love.

There's only one misdemeanor in Hannibal's file, a few months before he left France for Italy.

The pendulum stops. Will opens his eyes with a deep sigh, fixing his gaze on that red pin. Something aches inside him, he can feel Hannibal's heartbreak like it's his own. It brings a stab of physical pain to his own chest. It hurts so deep, it's insufferably painful. Wil brings his hand to his heart, grabbing at his shirt. He can't imagine how much pain must have Hannibal had endured.

"Oh, darlin', you can love, you know that," Will sighs with the sting of tears behind his eyes. He stretches his free hand and rubs the pad of his finger on the red pin adoringly as if it were Hannibal's cheek. "Who made you think you can't be loved?"

Hannibal was almost seventeen when he left France. He has been starving ever since. Starved for something to eat, starving to love, starving for someone to see him and love him.

Will sees him. Not yet. Not fully. He sees the potential Hannibal tries to hide in a futile attempt to be worthy of love.

Will could see him. Will could love him.

Will is not one for apologies. He is constantly unwarily or actively offending people, so he learned quickly that it was a waste of energy to be constantly apologizing for things he didn't care about. But he is not a total piece of shit, he can spare some niceties here and there. He does it a lot with his dogs, allowing a few scraps to fall on the floor between their paws, giving them the impression they made a successful hunt.

He can do the same for Hannibal Lecter. He has been an actual pain in the ass of the agent these last few days.

He will do it only this once though. It would be far too risky otherwise. He can see Hannibal. It's too dangerous for Hannibal to see him.

At least for now.

Will *will* eat that tuna and garlic salad he promised though, and he will probably take two showers and double the amount of aftershave he uses daily. He doesn't know how much of Hannibal's sense of smell was he bragging about and how much was real. Will will need to hide the smell of death from the man.

Will is risking too much doing this, doing Lecter a favor and playing with the FBI. *It would take a very stupid kind of man to put himself into this type of dangerous position.*

Will fixes his eyes again on the yellow pin, where Hannibal began to tailor his person suit. Moves them back in time again to France.

"I guess we all take risks for the people we love, Hannibal."

[x]

Will amuses himself watching the carcass of a rabbit that nobody cares about.

Everybody is far too busy with the body of Cassie Boyle resting on the stag head to pay any attention to a rabbit. Hannibal Lecter, especially.

(Will hopes Hannibal appreciates the artistry. It was damn hard to steal a stag head.)

Will risks a glance in the agent's direction and he is assaulted by a wave of horror. No appreciation for Will's artistry then. A shame. But again, not many people appreciate Will's artistry. He has learned not to take it personally. His canvas of preference is frowned upon by most.

"This is wrong, this is all wrong," Hannibal says, invisible brows furrowed and mouth twitching with disgust. For a man who hates Will's tableau so much, he can't seem to keep his eyes away from it. "This is not the Shrike, Jack. This is something else."

Will bites the inner side of his cheek. He is tempted to go to Hannibal and pet him on the shoulder, praise him, and tell him *'good job'* but he doesn't think it will be well received.

Yet.

Everything at its time.

"What do you mean?" Jack asks.

"Our cannibal *loves* these girls. He doesn't want to destroy them. He wants to consume them. Keep some part of them inside," Hannibal says, sounding almost desperate for Jack to see the way he sees. The words echo inside Will, the pain that Hannibal went through at some point coming back to him. He is getting tangled in the Shrike's mind. He sees too much of himself. Hannibal turns to the body and his eyes glisten with horror.

Will closes his eyes, hearing the ring of Hannibal's pain, savoring it. He blocks the interference of the forensic team around him and focuses on Hannibal's voice. The puzzle pieces begin to fall into place. Will can distinguish a certain silhouette. Skin dark as oil, bony limbs, and antlers.

"This girl's killer thought she was a *pig,"* Hannibal hisses, honestly distraught. Another piece for the puzzle.

"You're sure of that?"

Oh, Jack, Jack, Jack, dear old bull-headed Jack. Will laments internally, returning to the scene and taking tentative steps towards the men. Will is not wearing latex gloves, he is not

going to touch anything. He is not even going to pretend he is here to work. It's a thin barrier between him and Jack.

"Of course I'm sure, Jack. The cannibal who killed Elise Nichols had a place to do it and he had no interest in this…" Hannibal sneers at the body, gesturing with a blue-latex gloved hand. "This field Kabuki."

Hannibal says it with a sneer. Disgust oozes from his voice, but under that, Will can hear an underline of respect. Artist recognizes artist. Field Kabuki has a nice ring to it.

You're not disgusted by my tableau, you're disgusted at my approach.

"This killer is mocking us."

This killer is mocking the Minnesota Shrike. Is mocking the girls. Is mocking ***me.*** *Is mocking* ***her.***

If you loved her – (her? Yes. Her. The Shrike is much more like you than you would like) then why did you eat her?

"We're already looking at Minnesota steamfitters and plumbers and people with hunting licenses."

Hannibal shakes his head. Will can see the moment he organizes the profile. Picking away the parts that belong to himself, and then keeping the ones that belong to the Shrike. For a mind so clean and compartmentalized this must be a hell of a work, the mess must be driving him mad. "He has a daughter. Same age as the other girls. Same hair color, same eye color, same height, same weight. She's an only child. She's leaving home. He can't stand the thought of losing her. She's the one he wants to consume."

Will's chest fills with pride. *'Good job, Hannibal, good job.'*

Jack nods, then turns his perpetual frown to Cassie Boyle's body. "What about this copy-cat?"

Hannibal's upper lip twitches. *Curious.* Will takes another tentative step. He wants to hear Hannibal's opinion.

"He is incredibly intelligent, it will be hard to catch. There's no traceable motive. There'll be no patterns and no evidence. He may never kill like this again. He is just doing it for us."

Stop.

Will turns to the body, hiding himself from Hannibal's eyes. *'He is doing it for us'* it's very a very different statement from *'doing it to mock us.'* Hannibal is good, actually good.

Will is better though. Even if an alarm is ringing at the back of Hannibal's mind there's no way he suspects Will specifically. And even if he did, there's no motive, no patterns, no evidence.

“Can you tell me anything more?” Jack pushes, because he is always pushing.

“It would be stupid to look for this one, Jack, we’re not going to catch him. It will only be a waste of time,” Hannibal sighs. *Practical man over Savior Complex.* Will hears the crunch of earth behind him and under Hannibal’s shoes, can feel the maroon eyes focused on his back. “If you want a profile, have Dr. Graham work it up. You seem to be impressed with his opinion.”

It is said with as much respect as it is said with disdain, and Will turns to them at the mention of his name. He takes a deep breath and walks the few steps that separate him from the two men. The first thing he does is to place a hand on Hannibal’s back, surprising the agent.

It creates a united front, even if Hannibal doesn’t want it. Will very much prefers to be associated with Hannibal than with Jack.

“You should really listen to your profilers, Jack,” Will says. “Agent Lecter is right.

“We have a copy-cat, then,” Jack’s perpetual frown deepens even further as he pinches his nose. He is mad that he won’t be able to yell a profile out of them. He is mad that there is another serial killer doing rounds in Minnesota. The last time Will saw him was at court 6 years ago, and Jack looks at least 12 years older.

Hannibal flinches *(that’s curious)* under Will’s hand. Then he relaxes and shifts his body to lean his weight on his left leg, the one closer to Will *(curious and curiouser)*. Hannibal tilts his head towards Will, searching for support for what he wants to say. Will mimics him and meets the agent halfway. *(Curious, curiouser and curioucest)*

Will lowers his hand from between Hannibal’s shoulder blades to his lower back. He shifts his weight and their bodies touch slightly. A small nudge. *Go on, I’m with you.*

Hannibal squares his shoulders – he is about to say something Jack won’t like – and bares himself for the oncoming whiplash. He pushes his back against Will’s hand. *Touch starved.*

“Not a copy-cat,” Hannibal says finally. “I think this is *The* Copy-Cat.”

Will doesn’t need to fake surprise at hearing his moniker. He wants to cup Hannibal’s face and praise him. *‘Good job.’* He wants to pull a knife and slash the agent’s throat. *‘Too good of a job.’*

The light disappears from Jack’s eyes. Hope is crushed into millions of irreparable pieces. Will can’t imagine what’s going on inside Jack’s head. The man has been obsessed with Will for years, always waiting for the moment a new body will drop.

Jack turns his lifeless eyes to Will’s.

“I won’t look, Jack,” Will answers before the man can open his mouth. He suppresses his amusement and borrows Jack’s terror, putting that fear into his own words. “I don’t mind the Shrike, but I don’t want The Copy-Cat inside my head. I’m not a profiler and you *promised* not to put me in the field.”

Jack's shoulders drop and he looks at the ring on his finger with the expression of a man with a dead sentence. Maybe it would have been nicer to kill Jack instead of Bella. Would have been kinder for Jack. Bella would have followed him shortly.

But Will is not a kind person. Jack's eternal white whale will remain only a moniker hunting him and an unsolved file with the picture of his wife's corpse.

"Do you agree, Will?" Jack's voice is muted, lacking the usual power it has.

Sorry to disappoint Jack, I wasn't dead, I was just bored.

"With the expertise of your profiler?" Will sighs and gestures vaguely to the field. "Just look at it, Jack."

Jack nods once absently. He takes a moment to recover and his frown deepens further, turning his face into stone. Perhaps it has already locked in his face as Will feared. There's not really much in Jack's life to smile about after all.

Jack leaves barking orders at the forensics team and Hannibal releases a deep sigh.

"Thank you," Hannibal mutters softly with a nod.

"Don't mention it," Will says with a shrug. He takes a risk and pats Hannibal on the back and decides to push a little bit more. "You were right. And you're actually a good profiler," Will praises, winking at the agent over the rim of his glasses bringing some levity back.

Hannibal lowers his gaze, and a very dim blush graces his sharp cheekbones.

Touch starved. Praise seeking. Desperate to be loved. Will can work with that.

Will is quite amused to learn that the FBI has something called *'The Copy-Cat protocol'*.

Socializing like adults

Chapter Notes

> I swear I really try to upload this weekly but I just get SO excited when I upload long fics I can't contain myself. But this time for real, the next chapter comes on Friday next week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jack breaks his *no-field-for-Will* promise in the third week, sending Will to Minnesota with Agent Lecter. It doesn't surprise Will, but it took Jack longer than Will thought it would. Kudos to Jack for resisting for three long weeks.

Will is not bothered by it though. Jack is deposed in court, and the motel is not so terrible considering how much money Will's existence sucks from the FBI's funds. Also, Lecter seems to tolerate Will a lot more since last time.

And speaking of Lecter, Hannibal is outside Will's motel room.

Will can see the man's silhouette blocking the light of the window from the bed and waits patiently for the man to knock on the door. When the agent finally does… the best way to define his knocking is *regal.* He knocks twice in quick succession, without the cadence of anxiety or nervousness. It's short, and loud enough to be heard without being rude. Lecter is a man sure of himself, so he knocks and he is sure that he has been heard, so he waits.

Will drags himself from the motel bed with a soft groan. He isn't wearing much and decides not to put jeans on. If Hannibal wants to come knocking at – damn 6:25 a.m., then he will have to deal with Will's cotton boxers. Will may be crushing hard on the man, but that doesn't mean that he will hide his cheerful personality. He is still rude at heart.

For the sake of decency though, Will grabs last night's wrinkled flannel shirt and puts it on, but leaves it unbuttoned.

He hesitates about putting his glasses on. It's too damn early to have people wandering uninvited inside his head, but on the other side, Lecter's head is interesting, and quieter than other's.

Will spares himself a look into the old motel mirror. His hair is an actual mess, he has the lashes of one eyes still stick together with sleep. There's nothing in him that scream *serial killer,* and sleep in his eyes makes him look approachable.

The mirror also reflects the way the cold makes his nipples stand out, and unmade bed behind him looks so warm. Will can think of a lot more interesting and fun things to do on this cold fall morning with Hannibal Lecter than to drive around Minnesota and sort through files of

workers. He remembers the soft pink blush on the agent's cheeks last couple of times and deems it a fairly decent lure overall.

Will goes to open the door.

Agent Hannibal Lecter looks surprised for the span of half a second before he schools his expression into something that doesn't look like he wants to throw his coworker into the bed. He can't do much about the flush in his cheeks though.

Hannibal's eyes trail down Will's body and lack of attire, moving slowly. His pupils pulse and Will can feel the desire oozing from him. It's not unwelcome. But just as quickly as it has appeared it's gone.

Not gone. Hidden. Restrained.

Such a shame.

And so curious.

"May I come in?" Hannibal asks, holding up an insulated bag in the air, recovering himself, and locking his eyes on Will.

Sex would have been welcomed, and Will would have actually preferred it to breakfast, but he won't say no to food. Though he is mildly disappointed as he makes space for the agent to come in.

They settle at Will's motel room table. Will could put some pants on, or button his shirt up for the sake of decency, but Hannibal is openly appraising him – *lack of shame* continues to cement his profile on Will's head. His psychopathy is becoming more and more pronounced. It's interesting how he ended up as a criminal profiler and not a criminal.

Nature, not nurture. Or he nurtured his nature. *No.* Hannibal starved his nature. Trauma has clearly influenced his nature, but it's not the cause and has only pushed Hannibal to become obsessed with control. His clothes are impeccable ironed, packed with extreme care. His shirt is buttoned to the top, his hair is perfectly gelled back. He doesn't have a single loose thread on his person suit.

The breakfast is coffee of great quality, and curiously, again, homemade scrambled eggs with tofu.

Cannibal takes another point, as well as PTSD. Eggs don't catalog as meat, and by the soft consistence of them, seemingly neither does butter. So he does eat by-products of animals. The only thing that is wrong is the meat.

"I wanted to thank you for your help with Jack the other day at the crime scene," Hannibal breaks the thight silence after swallowing his second spoonful of eggs, ignoring the tofu. He has served very few pieces of it. *Consistency. Flavor.* He lowers his spoon and Will does the same with his coffee cup.

"You already did," Will points out just as charming and nice as he always is.

“Not in the way I would have liked.” Hannibal gestures to the ensemble in front of them, and Will shrugs, taking a spoon of eggs under the man’s gaze. Something clicks in the back of Will’s mind. *Savior complex. Caregiver. Food. PTSD. He isn't the only one that starved.* “I don’t know how much of it was for my sake and how much was your disdain for Jack, but it was appreciated either way.”

Will, with great disbelief, uses a real cloth napkin to wipe his mouth. “A little bit of this, a little bit of that. I don’t really know myself. You’re good at your job and you were right, and I don’t like when Jack thinks he can push people around.”

Hannibal nods. He is a very polite man, he will take Jack’s rough treatment with his chin up and a frown, but he won’t say a word. He won’t snap back as Will does.

Lack of moral compass, replaced by a sense of propierty.

Hannibal also isn’t a man who fidgets. His movements are controlled and well thought. He takes a sip of his own coffee and wet his lips just to make enough space in the conversation before he changes the topic.

“You knew too, that the Shrike loved the girls,” he says. Is not accusing, but also it’s not a question, and he finds Will’s eyes over the rim of his coffee. “Since the moment you discovered he was a cannibal I wager, but you didn’t tell Jack. May I ask why?”

“When I saw the pictures in his office, actually. Although I didn’t *know,* I… suspected,” Will explains. “I’m good at what I do, if I’m too good, Jack will be knocking at my door with every case.”

“You do have a restraining order against him.”

“Has it stopped him?” Will asks, sounding amused instead of irritated, and Hannibal smiles in answer. “Also… you’re ego took gracefully my cheerful personality the other day, I didn’t want to get on your nerves more than I already did. You’re good at what you do too,” Will adds, eradicating the teasing tone from his voice. “I knew you were going to notice it eventually sooner than later.”

Hannibal takes the compliment with a blank expression, actually taken by surprise. In the spand of the next second he blinks and lowers his gaze, and a fine blush appears on his cheeks that deepens slightly as he forces himself to take another sip of coffee. Will tilts his head to the side and leans back on the chair, he can feel the profiler’s eyes on him, trailing down his half-bare chest. He can also hear Hannibal’s loud swallow.

He wonders when was last time the agent had sex. With a face and body like that Will doesn't think he is lacking offers.

“Your work is notable too; Randall Tier, Tobias Budge, Matthew Brown,” Hannibal comments, voice sounding just *a tad* more breathless, and Will can’t resist the urge to drag his naked foot along the rim of the agent’s nice polished shoes.

When this topic is brought, Will usually sneers. The only reason why he doesn't do it now is because Hannibal's pupils are bigger than a second prior and his lips shine with spit.

"Isn't 3 the lucky number?" Will ponders out loud, waving his coffee with a disinterested air. "Third body turns a killer into a serial. What does a third serial killer dead make me?"

"A great asset."

"That's how you see yourself? An asset?"

"That is some lazy psychiatry Dr. Graham, are you going to ask me about my mother next?"

"Sorry," Will grins without actually feeling sorry. The smirk on Hannibal's face renews his teasing mood. "It's still too early in the morning, I'll come with something less obvious in the next hours. But since you mention your mother and not your father, I'd say you're more inclined to mommy than daddy issues?"

Hannibal levels him a look that attempts to be a glare, but it lacks bite and is far too amused to be taken seriously. Will hides his own smug smirk behind another sip of coffee and gives Hannibal a wink for his troubles.

"Fourth the Shrike," Hannibal pokes again, "Fifth The Copy-Cat."

"No," Will deadpans and Hannibal raises his eyes, surprised at the sudden change of Will's humor. "I'm helping with the Shrike, but I'm not getting involved with The Copy-Cat."

Will doesn't make a show of being tense, he doesn't need to do it with Hannibal as he does with the rest of the world. Most people respect Will's decision not to work on The Copy-Cat case because he fears for his own sanity. Jack (half-)respects his decision because he cannot force Will. Hannibal is different. He respects Will's choice because it is Will's choice. He also doesn't judge Will's lack of aversion or fear.

Is a nice change of air.

Will relaxes, leans back again on the chair and his shirt falls open wider. He is a person who believes in rewarding the dogs that behave nicely.

"I'm like catnip for serial killers, I barely survived Brown who was a youngling. I don't want to have The Copy-Cat have his eyes on me," Will mutters. He picks at a thread of Hannibal's savior complex and begins pulling, inflecting some distress in his tone. Enough to be believable, not too much as to be obviously lying. After all, his encounter with Matthew had been dangerous, almost put him behind bars for good. "I shouldn't even be in the field, damn, I should have stopped working on psychiatry after the Budge incident, but I never learn."

"They say that bad weeds are hard to kill," Hannibal attempts to change the air, easily hooked into Will's bait.

Will smiles at that, and the conversation stops for a moment while they dig into their breakfast.

Will is the one to resume it while Hannibal refills their coffees.

“You haven’t been working for the FBI for long, have you?” He attempts a small talk and flashes a grin at Hannibal when the profiler raises an inquisitive brow. “I can be friendly,” he adds, fauxely offended.

“Glad to know we can socialize like adults without you threatening me to eat garlic and tuna,” Hannibal teases. “And to answer your question, no, I started a year after you ‘left’,” he says, quotation marks clear in his tone. “Though I meant it when I said I know your name from your work. I never cared much about the FBI gossip.”

“You speak in the past tense, did it change?”

“I have no interest in the FBI gossip, but I’ll confess I did a little research about you after we met, hope you don’t mind.”

“I take it as a compliment, actually,” Will says truthfully and truthfully teasing. “Found something interesting?”

“Your work, mostly, but I was already aware of it, read a couple of your articles in fact. I found some TattleCrime articles about your conflict with the FBI, but I don’t know how much I could trust Freddie Lounds and how much of it was truthful.”

“A lot more than one would expect coming from Lounds, actually,” Will tells him, spearing a piece of tofu with his fork.

“She advocated a lot for your freedom after you killed Matthew Brown.”

“And I’ll always be in debt with her for that,” Will agrees, and doesn't swallow before he adds “And for the royalties of her book.”

He delights in the irritated glare the agent makes.

They fall into a comfortable silence again. Still, the atmosphere is charged, Hannibal’s eyes still latch from time to time onto Will’s half-naked figure, and while Hannibal doesn’t properly fidget, he also doesn’t try to conceal his gaze.

Will finds him again, locking his eyes with the profiler’s, and makes himself comfortable on his chair. Hannibal’s blush is a soft thing, just a flush that could pass inadverted to someone without Will’s sharp eyes.

It takes Will by surprise when Hannibal speaks again.

“Why are you on the field, Will?” He asks suddenly, changing the way he addresses Will, ambushing him in the most casual way. “It doesn’t surprise me coming from Jack, even after what he did to you. But it does surprise me that you accepted, you don’t seem like the type of man that forgives easily.”

Will stutters a sound that barely takes the form of a word. He knits his brows together and a smile tugs at the corner of his lips. “Agent Lecter,” Will says in a conspirational tone as he

leans forward over the table, “Are you trying to profile me?”

Hannibal’s smile grows by a degree, and the corners of his eyes wrinkle with it when he drops his gaze. It’s not shame and neither is shyness. He lowers his gaze and preens like a peacock.

“Difficult to avoid,” he says with a smug smile hidden behind a sip of coffee. He lifts his sparkling eyes again as he finds Will’s. Will, again, feels like it shouldn’t be considered sanitary to make bedroom-eyes over food. “I can’t turn off mine as I imagine you can’t turn yours either. Or are you going to lie to me and tell me you haven’t been psychoanalyzing me?”

Will rolls his eyes good-heartedly and bites his lower lip. He resists the idea of crawling over the table to kiss Hannibal only because Will would never throw food this good onto the floor – and because his psychoanalyzation of the agent tells him that Hannibal wouldn’t like to waste food either.

“What’s my profile principal trait?” Will asks instead. He holds the coffee cup loosely in one hand as he puts space between them, leaning back on the chair and spreading his thighs. Again, pupils pulse inside maroon eyes, and Hannibal’s grip on his spoon tightens at the show.

Hannibal takes a moment to restrain himself back, smiles very politely. When he wets his lips Will knows he is about to deliver a blow.

“Rude.”

Will barks a laugh, and he can feel warmth pooling in his own cheeks. When he gets to open his eyes, Hannibal is looking at him, looking as mesmerized as he is satisfied with himself.

“On point,” Will shrugs, bringing the coffee back to his lips to abate his laughter. “And the second?”

“Beautiful, extremely so.”

Will sputters coffee all over himself and hits his chest with his open palm as he chokes. Hannibal looks and *sounds* amused when he speaks.

“My, my, surely you’re not so blind, Will.”

“No,” Will admits, voice still a little hoarse as he tries to recover. “And you’re not exactly subtle either. Just… took me by surprise that you said it out loud.”

“Well,” Hannibal says, making a vague gesture in Will’s direction. Is the most polite way that anybody has ever called Will a *whore* before. He gives Will a decent amount of seconds to recover before he speaks again. “May I ask which is my principal trait?”

“Psychopath,” Will tells him, wiping drops of coffee from his thighs with the cloth napkin. Hannibal doesn’t look ashamed, of course, because *psychopath.* He also doesn’t look like

anything. All of the possible expressions are wiped from his face, leaving a blank canvas instead. Will is surprised again how good the agent is at mimicking expressions.

“Am I that obvious?” He asks, vaguely surprised and properly intrigued. More things to add to his file. He doesn’t deny it, and he is aware of his condition. He is surprised that Will discovered it, or that Will said it out loud. Probably because is of common courtesy not to point out people’s psyches out loud.

“Not really, I’m just very good,” Will jokes with a shrug, but pauses. *Praise seeking.* “You’re very good at blending in, Hannibal,” he says softly and appraisingly, watching the way Hannibal breathes and his chest fills with air, subtly squaring his shoulders.

Will wonders again, why is that Lecter reacts to his praise like this. He is handsome, he is intelligent, polite and successful, even probably talented at whatever he decides to do. Praise is probably thrown at him all the time.

Hannibal catches himself just in time, aware too of the way he reacted to Will’s praise, and reaches for his cup to find it empty. He is slightly nervous, or as much as his psyche allows him to be. He is probably wondering the same thing as Will.

“Do I want to hear my second one?” He asks as he tries to hide the way Will’s words have affected him. Not only his praise, but the way Will has taken on simple look at him and divested him of his disguise. Will sees the way Hannibal’s hand shakes a little when he refills his coffee.

Cannibal is at the tip of Will’s tongue.

Will rolls the word around his mouth, tilts his face towards the bed, and meets Hannibal’s gaze through the corner of his eyes. He slides his bare foot up Hannibal’s ankle, finding the soft sock with his toes, and watches the way the soft blush turns into medium-rare pink.

“Very handsome.”

Hannibal gasps and swiftly takes his foot away. He is suddenly distant. Hannibal’s grip on his fork tightens and he spears a piece of tofu perhaps a little bit too hard.

Will tilts his head to the side and knits his brows together. The desire has been and it’s actually still clear in Hannibal, and it’s not that Will’s bold behavior has pushed him away. Hannibal takes his eyes away from Will and spares a longing look at the warm mess of the bed before he frowns at his breakfast.

Curious behavior for a psychopath to not take what he wants, especially if Will is willing to give it.

“May I ask another question, Doctor Graham?” He asks with a strained voice, refusing to meet Will’s eyes. The way he addresses Will changes again and the friendliness is nowhere to be found. Hannibal is erecting walls to hide himself away, and it does nothing but make Will want to smash them down.

Will makes a sharp, disappointed noise clicking his tongue, and Hannibal's eyes quickly flare up to meet his. It reminds him of the unwilling way dogs react to simple sounds.

"Go ahead," Will says more softly, letting the agent off the hook for now.

Hannibal swallows and does his best to keep his eyes on Will as he speaks, though Will can see the way he wants to scurry away. "You could have left this investigation the other day. You told me you didn't want to be on the field, or consulting for the FBI. Why are you here? On the field?"

That's a good question, and one that Will has been hoping he would ask.

"Because," Will leans forward, placing his elbow on the table and lacing his fingers together. Under the table, he searches again for Hannibal's leg with his foot and watches the way Hannibal tenses and his pupils blow with desire. Will grins and licks his upper lip slowly like he is giving Hannibal a private show. He rests his chin on top of his hands and lowers his voice to a low, drawling purr that has the profiler taking a sharp inhale and unable to blink or look away. "Because I think you are a very interesting man, Hannibal. Could you blame me for wanting to become a little more friendly with you?"

Hannibal stays silent and unmoving for a second too long. The control he has over himself is something to admire, and Will can't wait to be the one who will break it.

"Finish your breakfast," Hannibal says, taking his leg away from Will's touch. His cheeks are aflame when he lowers his dark gaze.

So very interesting.

[x]

Will offered Hannibal to stay while he dressed up, but Hannibal, ever the gentleman, declined. Like he also declined the opportunity to push Will onto the bed, and Will's bold advances. So, sadly, the rest of the morning and a good part of the afternoon is dedicated to the bothersome task of reading files and driving across Minnesota.

It's at 3:47 p.m. that Will finds it.

The file is like every other, there's nothing in the name that hints anything, but Will holds it in his hands and he *knows*.

Hannibal is in the other room explaining to the secretary of the place about the history of the painting the company has in the waiting room. Will finds it endearing, the bored secretary not so much.

Will could bring the file to Hannibal – he will. But he also could *not* do something morally reprehensible – but he absolutely will. After all, presenting Hannibal with the Minnesota

Shrike on a silver platter is not fun, and would make it all too easy.

Will uses one of the tissues that are at hand on the desk to grab the phone and quickly marks the number on the file. From the other side comes a young, feminine voice, and Will can picture chaffed skin, brown hair, and blue eyes. Elise Nichols and seven more.

“Hello darlin’, could you put your dad on the phone?”

[x]

If Will harbors any doubt about the darkness he saw in Hannibal Lecter, the events at the Hobbs' residence easily evaporate them all.

Will knows there is darkness in Hannibal Lecter. Controlled and suppressed, yes, but still there. He can list all the man’s traits by heart. He is aware of the timeline of the man’s life. Will knows *psychopath, savior complex, cannibal.* Will knows *praise seeking, touch starved, loneliness,* and the way Hannibal craves to be seen and loved so desperately.

Will knows that if there’s someone who can see and love Hannibal, it’s him.

Before Will enters the Hobbs’s residence he doesn’t know yet if he *wants* to see and love Hannibal Lecter.

He wants to have fun with him, that’s true. But *love* is a four letter word with too beavy of a meaning.

Then the events unfold, and Will stands under the doorframe of the Hobbs’ kitchen as watches Hannibal shoot only once with extreme accuracy at Garret Jacob Hobbs’ hand, making the man drop the knife.

(The daughter survives with only a nick in her throat, but she doesn’t move, the shock freezes her. She’ll stay there, frozen in time and in that position until the ambulance arrives.)

Then Will watches in awe as Hannibal pounces like a predator over the counter, agile muscles flexing and teeth bared, eyes focused on the prize. He watches as the older man grabs a knife from the block blindly and stabs Garret Jacob Hobbs with it mercilessly in the throat.

Will sees Hannibal Lecter. He sees *psychopath, cannibal* and *starved for love and connection.* He sees the potential and the darkness, and he sees the man that is Hannibal Lecter, covered in blood and murderous. He sees the man that is and the man that could be.

Will *sees* and he doesn’t even have a choice in the matter anymore.

“See?” Garret Jacob Hobbs mutters from the floor, lying on a pool of his own blood. His voice is wet, and his eyes find Will’s. “See?”

Will *sees,* and, *oh,* Will *loves.*

Chapter End Notes

Some people asked me about Will's serial killer persona, it's going to be explained a little bit more in detail in future chapters, but there are some crumbs of information here and there. Specifically, I want to clarify: The Chesapeake Ripper doesn't exist in this AU, and Will is called "The Copy-Cat."

And if something isn't completely clear just let me know.

Unorthodox Therapy

Chapter Notes

Actually calling this "unorthodox therapy" is far too mild for what it is. This is more something like "manipulative flirting with the excuse of therapy from a very unproper and unprofessional psychiatrist".

Basically like canon Hannibal but this time is Will.

Also! Hannibal POV today folks and its 8k, a long upload today I guess.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dr. Graham is retired, has been retired for the best part of the last four years. He doesn't take any more patients, so he doesn't have an office anymore. So that's why Jack Crawford has so cavalierly lent them his office for their session. It is the polite thing to do, even if Dr. Graham is anything but.

The glass walls are covered with black cellophane curtains taped to the ceiling in an attempt for privacy that falls incredibly short. Hannibal still can hear the chatter and footsteps of FBI agents on the outside going about their days. The curtains are thin and cheap, if someone looks for longer than a second they would distinguish Dr. Graham as well as him inside the office, and everybody will know this is a ploy from Jack.

Actually, everybody knows this is a ploy from Jack, it's just that nobody is going to point it out loud.

Well, except for, of course…

"A clean bill of health, per Jack Crawford's request," Dr. Graham tells him, tapping the paper at Jack's desk in front of Hannibal with a twisted grin. He is looming over Hannibal, standing just at the side of where Hannibal is sitting, happily disregarding anything that can be remotely called personal space.

"It's not signed," Hannibal points out with a raise of his brow, craning his head to look at Dr. Graham's face. "You don't think I should be allowed on the field?"

In a perfect psychiatrist fashion, Dr. Graham deflects his question back: "Do *you* think you should be allowed on the field, Agent Lecter?"

"It matters very little what I think."

"It matters to me," Dr. Graham insists, still wearing that grin on his face. "If you tell me you don't want to be on the field and prefer to be in a classroom I won't sign it and you can go

your merry way. No broken feelings. Except for Jack's maybe, but who cares?"

“I’m very well aware why Jack asked *you* in specific and not another psychiatrist to do my psych evaluation,” Hannibal points out again, gesturing to the paper with his chin.

Jack is not exactly polite, but he gets results.

“He wants me to rubber-stamp you, yes,” Dr. Graham agrees, addressing the Jack Crawford-shaped elephant in the room. He rolls his eyes as he sits on the border of Jack’s desk, feet hanging two or three inches from the carpeted floor. “But believe me, I’ll even spit in Jack’s face if you ask nicely. Damn, even if you don’t ask nicely, I just need an excuse. Please, give me an excuse.”

Hannibal shakes his head softly and decides to ignore the comment, preferring to focus on his evaluation. “I enjoy my job, Dr. Graham.”

Dr. Graham is a curious person. He shifts from playfully rude to teasing to an incredibly sharp psychiatrist all over the span of one second. Hannibal thinks he is doing a decent job of keeping up with Dr. Graham, though sometimes he feels a little bit dizzy when the man shifts so quickly.

He wonders if it's the same for the rest of the world, all the people struggling to keep the man’s pace. He wonders if Dr. Graham ever grows bored of watching them try. He wonders if the man enjoys watching people struggle in things he excels at.

“And why is that?” Dr. Graham asks, shifting from playful to sharp in a blink.

Hannibal doesn’t know how to answer. Dr. Graham doesn’t give him context about that question, his expression reveals nothing, and when a certain answer would be correct for some, and actually expected, Hannibal doesn’t think it will work like that with Dr. Graham. While with other psychiatrists Hannibal would have known how to manipulate his way out of it, he is sure that he cannot do it with Dr. Graham.

Hannibal tilts his head instead, prompting the doctor to elaborate. “I’m sorry?”

Incorrect answer. Doctor Graham’s eyes gleam like a well-loved knife and he licks his lips to tame his growing grin.

“It’s a difficult job, time-consuming, energy-draining,” Dr. Graham elaborates waving a hand in the air for the sole purpose of indulging Hannibal. Hannibal has already answered incorrectly and whatever he says next won’t actually matter, except that maybe it will dig Hannibal a deeper grave.

“It’s a necessary job,” Hannibal objects. Another incorrect answer. Dr. Graham's eyes quickly set on him and the glasses he wears are not enough to protect Hannibal.

A grave 6 feet underground.

“Necessary for you?”

Hannibal makes a conscious effort not to square his shoulders, but he has the sensation that not even that can hide the answers from Dr. Graham. Shift or not to shift, what will reveal less?

“Necessary for society. I save lives.”

Incorrect. Another 6 feet lower.

“By catching killers or by being in contact with crime scenes?”

The question shocks Hannibal into a stupor for a long moment, unable to know how to answer it. Dr. Graham waits patiently for him, wearing a faux innocent expression, still with those sharp eyes piercing through Hannibal even behind a barrier of glass.

Hannibal catches on to the meaning of the doctor's words and he feels the sudden urge to bite back. His own eyes set on one of the pens that Jack keeps on his desk, and thinks of how satisfactory it would be to blind Dr. Graham’s eyes with them – he suppresses the fantasy before it can fully manifest, but it’s too late, Dr. Graham is biting at his lower lip, sharp blue eyes fixated on Hannibal like a hunting dog on its prey.

“I’m a psychopath, yes,” Hannibal agrees with thinly veiled anger, trying to recover from the psychiatrist's onslaught. He has already lost the chance to get the upper hand but he won't give up without a fight. “But I’m very well functional.”

That seems to be the closest thing to a correct answer.

“A well-behaved psychopath,” Dr. Graham says like he would say about a dog, studying Hannibal for a long moment with a serious expression and those eerie blue eyes. He leans back on the chair with arms crossed, shifting again into something razor-sharp and serious. “I won’t sign you back to the field unless you answer a few questions.”

“Fair enough,” Hannibal acquiescences with a nod and the doctor’s lips twitch upwards. "Please doctor, proceed."

“I want you to be honest though, you are incredibly intelligent and surely have fooled psychiatrists before, but if you’re honest, no matter what you answer, I’ll sign it,” Dr. Graham says, then, he adds with a shrug. “Of course, you can try to lie to me, but I don’t recommend it.”

"Because you'll see through me?" Hannibal asks, slightly irritated, and it only makes the twitch of Dr. Graham’s lips bloom into a sharp grin.

"Because I'll see through you," Dr. Graham confirms.

Hannibal frowns and taps his fingers rhythmically on Jack’s desk as he has learned to do from the man. He looks at the doctor through the corner of his eyes with suspicion. “No matter what I answer?” He inquires, and Dr. Graham answers with another disinterested shrug.

“As long as you’re honest, I don’t care about what you answer.”

“Why?”

Dr. Graham regards him for another moment with a fond expression, as if Hannibal has just done something particularly endearing. He is bold, but not as bold as he wants to be. Hannibal knows Dr. Graham could be a lot bolder just for the sake of it.

“Because I think you don’t get to be honest about yourself often, if ever,” he says, tapping Hannibal’s shoulder playfully with one finger.

Hannibal squares his shoulders and tips his chin up. The comment is expertly aimed. The twists and turns of Dr. Graham make Hannibal dizzy, like an elevator dropping too quickly, and he cannot recover from the fall before another cable snaps and it starts again.

"Alright," Hannibal agrees, and a devious smirk appears on Dr. Graham's face as the man jumps from the desk and begins pacing around the small office.

He seems revitalized by Hannibal’s answer and doesn’t lose time before he begins speaking.

“We all thought of killing at some point in our lives, at least once; be it by our own hand or God’s." Dr. Graham's words are measured as he goes to rest his back to the furthest wall. He lowers his glasses slightly so the rim doesn’t obstruct his eyes when he looks at Hannibal. He aims, and the arrow cuts through the air. “When was the last time you thought about killing someone?”

It's Hannibal's turn to smile then. Dr. Graham failed his shot.

“Many years ago, decades in fact,” Hannibal answers honestly and watches with great delight how that makes Dr. Graham stop in his tracks and frown. It was not the incorrect answer, but it was the answer Dr. Graham was not expecting.

“Right,” Dr. Graham agrees, with an offended roll of his eyes. “I’ll rephrase the question: when was the last time you thought about hurting someone? As honest as you can.”

“I thought of blinding you with the pens, just a minute ago, but I assume that you surely knew that already and are asking about previous experiences.”

That finally seems to be the right answer, and Dr. Graham smiles gleefully, showing two rows of sharp white teeth. “And before that?”

“Harming you when I met you at Jack’s office,” Hannibal confesses and it only makes Dr. Graham smile wider, if possible. “You were exceptionally and unnecessarily rude.”

“And you only thought of harming me? Most people want to kill me between three to seven minutes of knowing me.”

“I can’t imagine why,” Hannibal teases and Dr. Graham lets out a loud laugh, sharp like everything in him. “I still felt it was a privilege to be working with you. I have incredible respect for you, Dr. Graham.”

There's this glint in the doctor's eyes that appears from time to time. Like something has just clicked inside his skull. Inexplicable jumps in thought that only make sense to the man. Hannibal bites his tongue, tries to recall his own words, and tries to find what he has just stupidly revealed.

The glint disappears. Dr. Graham hums and pushes his glasses up his nose to hide his eyes once again. Hannibal has the strange sensation that he just passed a test, but it's short-lived.

"Did you want to harm Jack when you learned I was there to replace you? No, you don't need to answer that," Dr. Graham says, sentence after sentence without pause, eyes flickering around the room. "But answer me this, what triggers your need to harm people?"

"Is not a need, as you may see, because I haven't hurt you," Hannibal tells him, barely shifting his body on the chair to keep his eyes on Dr. Graham as the man goes to run his fingers over the cellophane curtains.

"Sure," Dr. Graham scoffs. "Desire then?"

"I wouldn't call it need nor desire." Is an honest answer and the corner of Dr. Graham's lips twitch again. Hannibal tries to deflect the question, expecting Dr. Graham to keep pushing and searching for a name for it, but there is no such luck.

"What does it trigger your no-need slash no-desire to harm people?"

Hannibal takes a deep breath and considers lying for a second too long which makes Dr. Graham curl a questioning brow towards him. No chance to lie then.

"Rudeness."

"Really makes me wonder why you haven't thought about killing me yet," Dr. Graham teases again. "So how is it? Some teenager steps on your toes, curses in front of you, or gets your coffee order wrong and you want to smash their heads against a wall?"

"Nothing so vivid." Hannibal makes a moue of distaste that once was forced and rehearsed and now comes almost naturally, but seemingly not enough to fool Dr. Graham.

"You don't need to feign expressions, they won't convince me and won't muddy the waters," Dr. Graham tells him, exuding naturally the disregard that Hannibal tries to mimic. He leans his back to the wall and crosses his arms. The grin has left his face but the teasing attitude seems to be ingrained in him. "Why not vivid?"

"I suppress these… ideas before they turn too vivid," Hannibal explains to him at the best of his expertise. "As I said, I'm a functional psychopath. They're not uncontainable urges."

"Well behaved," Dr. Graham repeats with a nod and Hannibal forces himself not to think about how sharp Jack's pens are. "Do you have any history of harming animals?"

"Not for pleasure. I hunted with my family," he elaborates before Dr. Graham can ask more about it, and quickly shuts down the next line of questioning. "But I never cared about harming them as the textbook psychopath you want to think I am."

Dr. Graham grins, sharp-edged and bright as a knife blade. His eyes glisten with something strange and dark. He pushes himself away from the wall, returns to the desk, and finally sits on the chair on the other side of it like an actual professional.

“You really didn’t think about killing me? Not even once?” He insists cheerfully, and Hannibal shakes his head in denial. He has actually not thought about it, only passing fancies of harm but nothing more than that. He respects Dr. Graham. He also finds him incredibly beautiful, so one could call Hannibal's lack of murder fantasies something like pretty privilege. “You should," Dr. Graham insists again. "To blow some steam you know, I swear I won’t take it personally.”

“I’m glad I have your permission if the desire arrives," Hannibal deadpans.

Dr. Graham winks at him and grabs one of the pens, playing with it between his fingers before pointing it towards Hannibal. His blue eyes are covered by the glass, and firmly fixated on the knot of Hannibal’s gray tie. “One last question: What is something you enjoy but you repress yourself from doing it? Doesn’t need to be something violent.”

Hannibal thinks about it for a moment, half-surprised by the turn in the conversation and curious by the question. There are many things that he deprives himself from, but he decides to go with the first that comes to mind.

“I enjoy the Opera. I don’t go as much as I would like.”

Correct answer, if there’s ever something like a correct answer with Dr. Will Graham. Maybe should be more proper to say the not-wrong answer.

“How many times do you go in a year?”

“I go three times per year, and I do not repeat a performance.” Hannibal expects Dr. Graham to ask a following question, ask him *why,* but as usual, he defies Hannibal’s expectations and turns the conversation differently.

“Have you been to the Opera recently?”

“Yes, last month. I usually wait at least three months before I go again.”

"You sound like an alcoholic in rehab," Dr. Graham comments idly, turning around on Jack's chair. "Only one glass at night, and only on special occasions."

Hannibal tries to come up with a retort but Dr. Graham's attention has left him. The man's eyes are unreachable and he throws Jack's pen on the desk without care. He grabs his phone and focuses on whatever he is doing with it ignoring Hannibal altogether.

Hannibal suppresses the urge to grab the pen and align it along with the others, unsure if Dr. Graham is too careless or too careful in his actions. Probably the latter.

There's that damned twitch on the doctor's lip again, a blink of a moment that tells Hannibal the man noticed. To act or not to act, it doesn't matter, there's no way to escape those terrible eyes.

Then, after minutes of silence, Dr. Graham passes his phone to Hannibal.

“I bought you a ticket for this weekend, a box, best seat of the house.” Dr. Graham states simply, showing Hannibal the information on the screen. “Actually I bought the full box, so you don’t have to share with anyone that can result in being a rude asshole.”

Hannibal looks at it with his lips parted, not sure of how to react. He doesn’t remember the last time someone truly surprised him so much that has rendered him speechless. *Thank you* would be the more proper response, but that feels like the incorrect one. Hannibal lifts his eyes from the bright screen and looks at Dr. Graham, question on his lips. “Why?”

Not-wrong answer.

“Because you should enjoy things,” he states simply. “You don’t go as much as you would like because of some stupid sense of propriety that is not yours. Enjoying the Opera is not bad. Go four times this year, or more. As many as you want, this is a gift. Here,” Dr. Graham quickly grabs his phone and returns it to Hannibal with the notes app open. “Give me your email and number, and I’ll send you the tickets.”

“I don’t actually know what to say,” Hannibal confesses, holding the phone in his hands with a sense of astonishment. He refuses to write his information – he feels that he should refuse. This clearly isn’t orthodox or professional. He can’t understand Dr. Graham’s motivation and it confuses him to no end.

He does want to go to the Opera though.

“I’d wager that it doesn’t happen to you very often,” Dr. Graham comments.

“Never.”

“Your email, Agent Lecter,” Dr. Graham reminds him, tapping on the corner of the phone, and Hannibal ends up obliging, still in a daze. “I want something in exchange.”

That lights up the alarms in Hannibal’s mind and he quickly lifts his eyes to meet Dr. Graham’s. He thinks of what Graham must want if it wasn’t clear enough already at the Motel in Minnesota.

Hannibal imagines it for a second. How would Dr. Graham’s sharp eyes look in the midst of pleasure, finally hazy and less dangerous. He has had a good look at the doctor’s body in Minnesota, almost naked. It doesn't need someone with an active imagination to fill in the gaps. Dr. Graham is gorgeous, and he would be so much more writhing with pleasure and would feel so good in Hannibal’s hands or Hannibal's mouth. His lips would be sweet and soft, and Hannibal wonders if he could kiss him without being cut with the man's sharp tongue.

“Not that, darlin’,” Dr. Graham reprimands playfully with a wink, leaning back on the chair. "But I'm up for it if you want to."

Hannibal doesn't bother hiding his face or fake embarrassment. It would be stupid to do so. He forces himself not to cross his legs though, the desk covers his partial erection perfectly, and even if Dr. Graham knew about it (that he most probably does know) it would only give him satisfaction.

"What do you want then?" Hannibal asks, still struggling to understand Dr. Graham's chain of thoughts.

"I want you to go and buy yourself a suit," he tells Hannibal, and again, Hannibal needs to take a moment to understand the words that come out of Dr. Graham's mouth. Graham grins again, pleased with the way he is shaking Hannibal from his edge.

Hannibal remembers once watching the way a spider caught a fly. He remembers the poor insect fighting for its life, while the spider ran in circles around it. Hannibal was barely able to keep his eyes on the arachnid without feeling dizzy, the little thing made a buzzing sound as it ran in fast circles. This feels the same, struggling to breathe and keep his eyes on the doctor's eyes, while Dr. Graham is quickly entrapping him without giving Hannibal a chance to fight back.

"Don't tone it down for anyone's sake. Buy the one you like the most and you usually don't allow yourself to buy. The one that you *want,"* Dr. Graham clarifies. "Not the one your stolen sense of propriety makes you think you *should* want."

Dr. Graham promptly steals a paper from Jack's desk and tears a piece of it, quickly using the (also) stolen pen to scribble something in it. "This is my number," he says, passing it to Hannibal. "I'll pay for the suit too. Treat yourself and send me the bill."

"I can pay for myself," Hannibal protests weakly, trying to find a way to untie himself from the sticky spider web in which Dr. Graham is holding him down.

"Then do it," Dr. Graham says with a shrug and another pleased grin, sounding more defiant than amused. "Buy two suits instead of one and repeat the performance. I'll pay for one and you for the other." Dr. Graham's eyes sharpen and he leans forward on the desk. "Do it, and I'll sign your return to the field."

Hannibal ponders about it for a minute and tilts his head curiously to the side. "I must confess, Dr. Graham, this is the strangest form of coercion I have ever experienced."

"Thank you," Dr. Graham answers with a cheerful smile. "So, will you do it?"

"Will you sign?"

"I promise, cross my heart," he jokes, holding a hand in the air and crossing his chest over his heart twice.

Then Hannibal nods.

Dr. Graham grabs the evaluation and signs at the end, finally rubber-stamping Hannibal. He turns the paper around and slides it towards the agent with a pleased smile. "Congratulations

Hannibal, you're more or less sane."

Hannibal goes to grab it but the doctor quickly puts his open palm on top of the paper before Hannibal can take it.

"One more little thing," Dr. Graham says, with that sharp smile he has that precedes nothing good. Hannibal bares himself for whatever surprise he has under his sleeve, but as usual, nothing could have prepared him. "Is nothing so terrible, don't look at me like that Agent Lecter, think of this as a therapy exercise, if you will."

Dr. Graham leans closer over the desk, the movement very similar to the one of a snake in the way he cranes his head and his throat curves to the side. Or, if one were to follow the spider metaphor, the way spiders unfurl their legs when they come out of their nest, moving their fangs before jumping to eat. His glasses slide down his nose, giving those gleaming and dangerous blue eyes an unobstructed path to look at Hannibal's.

"Next time you feel the impulse to harm someone – don't do it, of course, but think about it, don't repress it. Allow it to build within you, fantasize," Dr. Graham says softly, finally releasing the evaluation and pushing it toward Hannibal. "There's nothing wrong about fantasizing."

"I don't think that would be proper," Hannibal contradicts, holding the need he feels to swallow, knowing it will echo in Jack's office. It would be far too telling. He realizes then that the way he is holding himself stiff is also telling. There's no way to hide anything from Dr. Graham's eyes. "Neither the exercise that a professional should give to a psychopath with violent fantasies."

Dr. Graham makes a vague gesture to the office around them with his eyes.

"Well, would you consider I would agree to do this if I was a proper professional?"

Hannibal doesn't answer. He thinks maybe he needn't have to answer anything to Dr. Graham for the man to know the answers. It's disarming and thrilling. Hannibal wonders, perhaps, if this is how it feels to be scared.

It's terrifying and exhilarating. A new experience he can't get enough of.

Dr. Graham finally stands from the chair, ready to go, and regards Hannibal for a little bit longer.

"So, you have my number, if you need anything or want to talk further, feel free to call or send me a message. Especially if you want to have sex with me. And don't forget to send me the bill. If I see a number lower than 20 thousand I'll know you didn't buy the suit you wanted. Do we have a deal?"

"We do," Hannibal agrees, extending his hand. "Thank you, Dr. Graham."

Dr. Graham's eyes flash to his hand before they settle back on Hannibal's eyes. For a second, Hannibal thinks Dr. Graham is going to be rude for the sake of it and decides not to accept his

hand, but of course, he does something *far* worse.

Dr. Graham spits in his own hand and grabs Hannibal's before the agent can take it away, looking absolutely pleased when Hannibal shivers with horror.

"Thinking of killing me yet?" Dr. Graham asks sounding more amused than hopeful.

The urge to grip the man's hand tighter until the bones snap appears at the forefront of Hannibal's mind, and instead of brushing it away, Hannibal allows it to settle and grow.

He thinks of the sensation of the man's flesh under his hand, the satisfactory sound the bones would make when snapping. He can picture it clearly, the wounded noise the doctor would make, the proud smile he would wear. Hannibal wonders how good is Dr. Graham's tolerance for pain. If he would fall to his knees in pain, or if he would beg Hannibal to stop. Hannibal doesn't think Dr. Graham is a man who begs, except perhaps for more.

The thought ignites something inside Hannibal, hot and thick, a deep urge that was buried far long ago that is now resurging and refusing to be ignored and buried back again.

"I'm thinking of breaking your hand," Hannibal confesses calmly, gripping just a tad bit tighter than he should. Not enough to cause any real pain, but to scratch that itch in the back of his mind that is begging to test the man. The fantasy on his mind changes, the pained whimpers that the doctor would make during sex so similar to the ones he would make when truly in pain, making Hannibal unable to distinguish one from the other; making the Will Graham in his fantasy also not be able to distinguish between pain and pleasure.

"Good enough, I guess." Dr. Graham makes a show of pouting his lips like he is disappointed, but humor is clear in his eyes, and so is the desire he doesn't bother to hide. "But I must insist, if you're having fantasies with me, you should at least call me Will."

Hannibal takes a deep breath, releasing the doctor's hand just to have the younger man wipe it clean on Hannibal's jacket. He pushes suicidally further, dragging Hannibal with him.

"Will," Hannibal says, forcing the word from his mouth and thinking about how much force he will need to use to get to break the doctor's fingers. The thoughts must be too clear on Hannibal's face, or Dr. Graham is really that good at finding which button to push, because he winks at Hannibal before heading out to leave the office.

He hovers on the door for another second though, looking pleased with himself.

"Don't worry, Hannibal," he says with another wink. "When you get to murder fantasies base with me, you can call me whatever you want."

[x]

Hannibal finds himself more agreeable to Will's proposal than he thought he would be, and more faithful than he wanted to.

(No. Not the sex one. But it would be a lie to say that one doesn't occupy a good enough space of his mind.)

There's only a few days until the Opera, and so Hannibal won't get a tailored suit, but a fitted one will do fine for now. Something already made, fitted for him.

He goes through the many suits there, ignoring the ones that are decent enough to be seen wearing at the Opera without being considered too extravagant and goes straight to the expensive ones, the ones that only people with his fortune can allow themselves to have.

Hannibal finds himself against the mirror, wearing a dark purple one that won't be considered too eye-catching for the Opera, but with a close inspection everybody would recognize the cost of it. The darker diamond pattern that gleams when it catches with the light, the matching pocket square and tie that have orange flowers instead of the grey things he uses to work. Things that he hasn't allowed himself to wear outside of his fantasies.

It's tasteful, and more flashy than he usually wears, and Hannibal wants to never take it off.

'I realized you haven't stipulated a price range.' Hannibal types on his phone, finding that his fingers tremble slightly as he does. Will may not have as much money as he does, but Hannibal is sure the doctor can stomach the expense. He wouldn't have offered if not, he knows enough of Hannibal already to know his taste. He surely has the means to pay for it, if his seven dogs haven't eaten through the FBI money.

'I didn't.' Comes the expectedly unhelpful response.

The tag says 38 thousand, and Hannibal does have the means to buy it, even if he never does. It's dangerous to do so. He doesn't want to take this one off, doesn't want to leave it at the tailor. He wants to buy two, just as Will told him to.

Maybe three. Throw all his decent clothes and replace his wardrobe with *good* ones.

'So I take there is no limit?' Hannibal inquires again, just to be sure. Is the polite thing to do.

He will take it, no matter what Will says. He cannot not have it now that he has worn it. Years of abstinence and not indulging made enough savings to spend on this easily without even feeling it. He doesn't even have to reach his old fortune for this.

'No limit. Go wild.'

Hannibal is drumming with pent-up energy. It's exciting. He wants to indulge.

He sends another message, a final warning. He half-hopes Will is going to confess he doesn't have that kind of money and tell Hannibal to buy something cheaper. It won't work, but it will make Hannibal reconsider the idea of setting his whole wardrobe on fire.

'It's 38 thousand.'

‘Can I see?’

The answer, as usual, is unexpected and confuses Hannibal further. It should be expected at this point to expect the unexpected, and yet still Hannibal can’t seem to get a grip.

He aims the phone camera at the mirror, still feeling slightly in a daze, and tries to compose himself enough to not show his thoughts on the picture. Hannibal is not sure if he succeeds, but hopes that Will’s sharp eyes at least are weakened by the medium.

‘God, you look gorgeous. It’s absolutely worth it. Does it come with everything? Shoes, underwear all that?’

Hannibal’s breath quivers, and he feels his cock filling. His reaction to Will’s praise is a new experience. He wants to soak in it and buy more suits just to have Will call him *gorgeous* again. The idea of setting on fire his wardrobe doesn’t sound so terrible now. He could buy all the things anew, identical but better, with the addition of two new three-piece suits.

‘Yes,’ Hannibal writes, feeling the urge to bear more information and not being able to contain it. It’s not as terrible as confessing to fantasies of harming people, but somehow it feels like it’s more dangerous to address how much he wants Will's praise and opinion. *‘I’m also having another tailored specially for me.’*

‘Good, you should. How is it?’

Hannibal has to take centering breaths. He hasn’t yet bought this suit, it wouldn’t do to dirty it before he can take it to the Opera.

‘Another three-piece. Plaid, grey and red.’

‘That sounds ugly. But I’m sure you’re the only person on earth that could make it work. Maybe send me another pic when you get it?’

Hannibal thinks about it. He shouldn’t. He has never lived by other people’s opinions and never cared about their praise. He has only listened to their opinions when he needed them to tailor his person.

Now, Will’s praise is different. Will is different. It’s not praising the person Hannibal tries to be. It’s praising the thing Hannibal is. Cooing it to the surface, pulling at the loose threads of Hannibal’s handiwork. Will is flaming Hannibal’s indulgences. It’s a dangerous thing to do, and Hannibal doesn’t doubt that the doctor is aware of it.

Still, the damage it’s done. He will buy this one, and buy the other, and consider his wardrobe when he returns to his home.

[x]

Hannibal ends up wearing the suit at home when he doesn't need to leave. He doesn't want to take it off. He wears it not in the way people experience the desire to wear new clothes for the novelty of it, but maybe there's something of it too.

The thing is, he has tried to wear his normal clothes, but after finally indulging in this, the clothes remind him of his past. Itchy, bad-quality clothes of the orphanage. Handed down, uncomfortable. Something that doesn't fit him.

It brings him back for a moment to France, when Lady Murasaki took him shopping after the first month, buying him fitting clothes, good quality clothes that felt like silk on his skin. Clothes that were for him, not for another.

It makes Hannibal pause and wonder how much Will knows.

Surely he cannot read minds, cannot know that much.

[x]

Hannibal goes to the Opera as Will told him, he can't not go. He is dressed in the new suit and the world takes a different color, just like it felt after he put on the suit for the first time.

The music has a new cadence, the smells are more vivid, and the colors are brighter. He feels *good.*

Not *nice.* Not *decent.* Not *enough.*

Good. Incredibly good.

Hannibal is offered a glass of champagne, and he thinks twice before rejecting it. Every time he has come to the Opera he has worn a decent suit and has rejected alcohol. Now he thinks of texting Will, just to have an excuse to indulge, knowing that the doctor will encourage him to.

He thinks of texting Will, but that would be more dangerous, a line that he shouldn't cross. The praise is good, but addicting, and it wouldn't be wise to make Will aware of how he has slid under Hannibal's skin.

The alcohol is sweet, the music is wonderful, and life is enhanced by the sensations.

And when a phone rings rudely across the theater in the middle of the show, Hannibal closes his eyes, sits back, and listens to the sweetest music while he indulges in a fantasy instead of suppressing it.

Doctor's orders.

[x]

Hannibal wakes up in the middle of the night as it is his daily nightmarish routine.

He is slightly out of breath, and his heart is beating painfully inside his chest. He can still hear the dry coughing in his ears and the cruel wind outside. He can hear the rumble of steps over his head. He can hear the way the floorboards creak and spill dust over his hair.

Hannibal forces himself to open his eyes and look at his surroundings. The deep blue walls of his house in Baltimore, the sheets that just until last week were perfectly decent and now feel like sandpaper on his skin, the heavy and thick comforters on top of him.

It's still dark outside, and the clock on his bedside table marks that is well past 2 A.M.

Not Lithuania. Not 9:37 P.M. Not winter.

"My name is Hannibal Lecter," he mumbles, forcing his tongue to work, pushing through the urge to keep silent. The voice that comes out and finds his ears is the one of an adult man groggy with sleep, and not of a child whispering in the dark. He swallows the knot in his throat and forces his eyes to stay open, taking in his surroundings. "It's 2:47 A.M. I'm in Baltimore Maryland, and it's fall, not winter."

He returns from the cold Lithuanian castle to the present in increments, padding through the house with warm slippers on his feet and a warmer robe around him, turning the lights on as he goes to the kitchen. The peaceful rumble of the heater fills the silence as he turns on the stove.

Hannibal sits on the kitchen table with a hot chamomile tea and crackers. It always works to chase the cold that stubbornly clings to him and to calm himself to get back to sleep.

The contact of the air against Hannibal's clammy skin is chilling. A quick look at his phone to check the weather reminds him further that he is not in Lithuania anymore and neither is the winter keeping him trapped.

It also reveals a message from Will Graham that makes his heart beat off rhythm again.

'How was the Opera?'

The message was sent late in the night, well past midnight when Hannibal was already asleep. Hannibal supposes it's not surprising that Will has an unusual sleep schedule, all things considered.

Still, it is very late now. The polite thing to do would be to wait until morning to answer, but Hannibal finds his fingers tipping against what is polite and expected.

'I deeply enjoyed it, more than I usually do. Thank you again.'

He hovers over the message without sending it yet. Even if Will is asleep, he will see the hour of the message displayed, and that will undoubtedly open a line of questioning tomorrow, or, if Will is awake, now.

Tea and crackers have always worked to chase the nightmares away, but the idea of reaching for company is tempting. Even if it's Will psychoanalyzing Hannibal's sleep schedule. Especially if it's Will, just being there at the other side of a screen, existing and typing back.

Hannibal sends the message and quickly puts the phone away, realizing that the action has left him panting.

A foolish line of thought, to consider that Will is going to answer in the middle of the night, or that he will want to talk with Hannibal.

The Pandora Box is opened though, and Hannibal's phone pings awake, showing a message from Will that doesn't even bother to disguise his intention:

'Trouble sleeping?'

Hannibal huffs an amused sound at the obvious line of questioning. The only thing that is not unexpected is that Will is going to grab any chance he has to psychoanalyze Hannibal's mind. He decides to comply, after all, is not so terribly difficult to decipher, and the Opera has been nice.

'I had a nightmare.'

It's perhaps – undoubtedly, very dangerous to open himself to Will. But the doctor's words echo back *"You don't get the chance to be honest about yourself often"* and Hannibal heard the truth in them the first time, now he feels it, considers it, and finds that *yes,* he could use it. Could use the company too.

'Do you have them often?' Hannibal can even imagine the smug tone of Will's voice, can picture with stark clarity the way his sharp tongue twists the words.

He writes a curt *'You have to try better than that.'* but denial and deflection are as good as to say the truth, and even if he doesn't think that Will can detect lies through texts, he prefers not to risk it. The amount of time he has spent doubting is enough as honesty too.

Hannibal is curious too, and wonders what would Will say to get the answer he is looking for.

'Only every day.'

Will takes his time answering. Hannibal watches transfixed the dots on the screen for the better part of two minutes. He has learned to expect the unexpected with the younger man, and he drums with excitement, the thrill of the conversation washing away the winter mist that still clings to his mind.

The message that comes is shorter than expected, and kinder. Hannibal was actually waiting for Will to take the chance and poke at the wound, and ask about his nightmares. Instead, he

writes: ***'Is there anything I can do?'*** like a good psychiatrist would do. Even what Hannibal thinks a *friend* would write.

Hannibal grabs that thought with curious fingers and observes it against the kitchen light. It's new. He doesn't think he has ever considered someone a friend before. He wonders if Will could consider him a friend.

'Just talking with you has already improved my night. Why are you awake?'

'Flatterer. Reading a book, I sleep late.'

'What are you reading?'

There's a moment of silence in which the dots don't appear, and Hannibal frowns. He puts the phone down, returning to sip at his tea.

The phone pings again, and contrary to what Hannibal expects, Will has written: ***'Can I call you?'***

Hannibal writes *'please'* with the shaking fingers of a child, then *'nothing would delight me more'* like an adult, then erases that one too and instead taps at Will's contact number and calls him himself.

"I'm reading *Phoenissae*, Seneca's, if you're still wondering. What are you doing?" Will's voice greets him.

"I'm in my kitchen, eating a midnight snack."

Will hums, there's the echo of the crack of logs in the fire coming from the other side, the telling sound of movement, probably the dogs, then wood creaking and fabric shifting. Will must be reading in bed.

"I want to make you an offer," Will says suddenly, cutting the silence short before it can stretch longer than a handful of seconds. He is full of surprises and Hannibal is thrilled. Curious. Is a dangerous thing to be curious.

Hannibal makes a non-committal hum, expecting another flirty comment from Will. That would be expected, judging by the hour, the situation and Will's knowing attraction to him.

It's the incorrect assumption, clearly. Will is not so predictable.

"Jack asked me if I have any therapist to recommend for you."

"Does he think I'm not fit for work?" Hannibal asks affronted. Even when he expects the unexpected he still is unable to not be surprised.

"I think he wants to have some insight of you, and keep tabs."

"Do you think or do you know?"

Judging that the person who says it is Will, *suspecting* and *knowing* are basically the same thing. Will knows it, and knows that Hannibal knows it, so he doesn't answer, instead, he deflects and goes straight to what he wants to say. "I'm willing to resume my practice, only for you, and be the one in charge of your therapy."

"You'll have to report back to Jack," Hannibal counters and a short, sharp laugh echoes from the other side of the line.

"I'm the only person you can trust 100% percent that won't rat you to Jack."

"I thought you didn't want to resume your practice. Though I'm honored that you decided to make an exception for me."

"Darlin', it would be an honor to me if you allowed me inside your head," Will purrs. The bed creaks under him as he shifts, and Hannibal doesn't need to see him to paint a picture of how Will must look. The desire in his eyes, the lascivious curl of his lips, the erotic curve of his back. "I promise that I'll treat it with utmost care."

It's Hannibal's turn to laugh then, and he manages a short, playful scoff. "I don't believe you for a second. You have stumbled your way inside my mind as if it belongs to you." There's a huff of air from Will's side, and Hannibal can almost see the shape of Will's smile in the sound. "I don't see why would you offer it. Surely you don't need more money."

"No, I don't. I would even do it for free if you asked for real therapy from me. But consider it for a moment; you'll have a real safe space to talk, Jack gets what he wants and I get to spend more time with you. We all win."

"Are you interested in my mind Dr. Graham, or just in my bed?" Hannibal deflects, expecting Will to make a flirty comment. He can almost hear *can't it be both?* in Will's on-and-off southern accent.

Again, so stupid of Hannibal to think he can predict Will.

"Or I can recommend to Jack that you get therapy with Frederick Chilton. Your pick, Hannibal."

"You wouldn't dare," Hannibal says, feeling himself smile. Not the rehearsed thing he has learned to shape, but a real thing that appears against his will, and only for Will.

"Watch me," Will threatens, "I'll get out of bed right now and write that recommendation letter."

"Your blackmail abilities astonish me."

"Thank you," Will answered very proudly, leaving a pause of a few seconds. "So? Have you had enough time to consider it?"

"I'm sure your bed is highly comfortable, I would dread to make you abandon it."

"So nice of you, yes, it is comfortable and full of dogs, they're grateful that I haven't gotten out." Will makes a pause and allows the silence to settle just so he can break it. "Tell me, Hannibal, what's bothering you?" He mocks, making an effort to resemble an actual professional psychiatrist worming his way into Hannibal's mind and not a rude man demolishing the barriers in front of him just for the sake of it.

"Am I that obvious?"

"No darlin', I'm just incredibly good. Go on."

"I don't see what you get in this situation."

Will hums and there is another creak of the bed, one of the dogs whines and Will quickly coos it back asleep before whispering back to Hannibal. "How honest do you want me to be?"

Will's voice sounds closer to the microphone, even when he whispers. Hannibal can imagine him lying on the bed between the dogs, head against the pillow and phone pressed against his cheek. He wonders if Will wears something other apart from boxers to bed, or if he opened the door in Minnesota in that level of undress just to mess with Hannibal.

"If you expect honesty from me in our sessions, I think is fair that I should expect the same from you."

"I get to spend more time with you," Will says simply. "And I'll keep your interesting mind away from the clumsy fingers of undeserving idiots with a title."

With any other person, Hannibal would point out that there must be at least one psychiatrist who is good enough in Baltimore. The problem is, that he is talking with Will, and in comparison to him, everybody else is an idiot with a title.

"Do you think you deserve to study my mind?" Hannibal inquiries, sounding far too flirtatious to his own ears.

"I don't care if I deserve it, Hannibal. I just want it."

Hannibal's throat clicks loudly when he swallows. He taps his fingers against the cold cup of tea in front of him.

Will Graham is too good. He sees too much. It's dangerous. It's thrilling and exciting and Hannibal wants it with a ferocity that he hasn't felt in years. He shouldn't indulge. He shouldn't let Will inside his head, he has gone too deep already.

"Then you shall have it," Hannibal says, ignoring his common sense and indulging that part of him that Will is calling for. "When do we start?"

"What about right now?" Will says and finally pokes at the wound just because he can, not expecting to have an answer but enjoying the fun of sticking his fingers where he shouldn't. "What are your nightmares about?"

"You'll have to do better than that, Will. Goodnight," Hannibal says and hangs up.

It would have been rude in any other context, but Hannibal can hear Will’s laugh so clearly inside his head that for a second he thinks he hasn’t properly hung up the phone.

Chapter End Notes

This is the second fic in which I mention a spider running in circles to catch a fly. This is because I actually have a friendly spider in my room and I watched her do that and it was AMAZING. Today is a sad day because after six years of living in the corner of my room, my dear arachnid friend has been swept by a terrible broom accident during my absence. She will always be missed and I'll remember her as the skilled hunter and friendly neighbor she was. RIP Bonita.

Just having conversations

Chapter Summary

More questionable therapy.

Chapter Notes

I'm so happy that you're enjoying how bold and THIRSTY Will is because I swear he won't stop, he is a menace and he will be worse. Thank you all for the comments I swear I'll answer everything, but know that I read them and I'm so grateful for each and every one. Thank you so much for all the support! ❤️❤️❤️❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The clock (a plastic, cheap thing) on Alana’s desk marks that half an hour of their third session has passed. Alana's office has warm gray walls and a warm beige carpet. She has a lot of books, very few of them about psychiatry and a lot of them about pirates. Most of them have colorful drawings and the marks of small hands dirty with chocolate.

There is a lounging chaise against the far wall that stays mostly unused and reserved for her older patients or for the occasional nap in the after-hours. There’s her desk and her chair, and there are two mismatched armchairs sitting in front of each other. In one, sits agent Hannibal Lecter, in the other, sits Dr. Will Graham.

Alana has been very kind to lend Will her office for Hannibal’s sessions. Each Thursday at 6:30 p.m. she leaves and at 5 minutes to 7 Will enters, followed by Hannibal 5 minutes later.

Will’s house is too far away, and he is a very private person. He offered to do house calls for Hannibal, but the agent had politely refused. A common ground felt more professional and kept the weak and beaten-up barrier of patient-doctor in place against all of Will's attempts to demolish it.

(Also, and most importantly, it keeps Will Graham out of Hannibal’s house.)

It’s also the polite thing to do, to meet somewhere in between. Hannibal is the only patient Will has. The first one in four years since Matthew Brown. Jack had asked Will to have only one session with Hannibal, and under that, he had asked for a rubber stamp. Will was the one to offer more. Hannibal has taken it as the honor it was.

In the last four weeks, the doctor has climbed over Hannibal's walls, picked every single lock he found on the way, and even broke a few windows. Hannibal finds rudeness inexcusable, but Will Graham with his dry wit, brilliance, and sass is singularly the most beautiful and interesting person Hannibal has ever met in his entire life. Therapy has been actually nice, nicer than Hannibal had expected. It has never worked for Hannibal in the past, always happening to manipulate his way out of evaluations o hiding enough of him so as to not be kicked out of the FBI. Now with Will, therapy is freeing, and sometimes even useful. Will is intelligent and skilled, and once one gets used to being the focus of his snarky comments from time to time, entirely lovely.

Hannibal hasn't yet become used to being the focus of those eerie blue and all-seeing eyes, but he doesn't think he ever will, or if there's a person alive that has ever become used to it.

Every day that passes between sessions is torturous, the weeks feel never-ending, and Hannibal finds counting the minutes before he gets to see the doctor again, though it has less to do with therapy and more with the desire to be in Will's presence. Hannibal still refuses to visit the doctor's home, no matter how much Will insists on extending invitations, and he forces himself also to not allow Will to come to his house. A friendly relationship in which Hannibal can bask in his presence is enough. Whatever comes next is dangerous. Hannibal doesn't trust what could become of him if he allows Will more power over him, or if he welcomes the doctor inside his house.

Yet still, Will fosters their codependency, weaponizes his desire for Hannibal, and flames the matching spark of desire that lives inside Hannibal. Hannibal (stupidly, suicidally) allows it. Indulgence is something in which he doesn't partake often, if ever, but with Will is now more of a common occurrence in his life. Messages and calls are exchanged between Thursdays. Shared coffee when they find themselves to be at QUANTICO at the same time is the highlight of Hannibal's days (the coffee always, *always,* brought by Hannibal. It was decent the first times, more palatable than the FBI's coffee, but surely nothing to be talked about. But as it happens with Will, Hannibal craves the doctor's praise, craves the way his smile stretches with pride, craves the doctor's eyes on him. Hannibal craves to indulge him as much as he resists indulging himself. The coffee has turned from palatable to decadent in only a single week, carried to work every day in a thermos waiting for the opportunity to be shared with Will and for Hannibal to hear that sinfully lewd moan that the doctor lets out with the first sip).

(Hannibal realizes, just a day after the second week, that it was also a manipulation from Will's part to get Hannibal to indulge. Hannibal has to commend him for it.)

And then *therapy,* if it can be called that. Therapy is one-sided; this that Hannibal has with Will is more similar to weekly scheduled conversations with a friend. Though Hannibal insists on calling them therapy sessions and Will insists on calling them *dates.*

Hannibal tries to keep himself under control, he accepts the attention and refuses the boldest advances, always keeping the doctor at arm's length. But is easy to admit now, and very safe to accept, that Hannibal is just as obsessed with Dr. Graham as the man is with him, and it is just a matter of time until Will finally brings Hannibal's barriers down.

And he will. Will is patient, after all, he is taking Hannibal's mind palace down brick by brick, and Hannibal knows, he won't stop.

“You are very talkative today,” Will says sarcastically, as it is his default.

“Does it surprise you?”

“Well, you do love the sound of your voice,” Will jabs. Today he is in a good mood, teasing all the way to bring a twitch to Hannibal’s lips.

Hannibal offers a small smile that makes Will’s eyes sparkle and acquaintances the teasing with a nod.

“I don’t feel like talking today.”

“Are you not feeling talkative or are you just not interested in talking about a certain topic?” As is his fashion (blunt with no regard for Hannibal’s barriers or common courtesy) Will asks even if he already knows the answer, poking at a bruise just to watch it turn milky white before it regains its color back and to delight with the small flinch of pain from the profiler.

“You don’t need my answer,” Hannibal reminds him, and Will, as usual when Hannibal is being difficult, smiles.

Hannibal is content to just look at Will. He *would* prefer to talk and hear Will’s voice and bask in their sparing conversation. He has waited all week drowned in reports for Jack, just for this blessed hour in which he has Will Graham in front of him. Not a voice in his ear at night, nor a typed message on the phone or a quiet conversation on QUANTICO's halls that could be overheard. Just Will in the flesh in front of him, and Hannibal being able to bare himself almost completely.

Hannibal would prefer to have a conversation with Will, but reports about the Hobbs' case have been piling up, news reporters are all over the place, the trial has started, and he and Will have been asked to declare both to the justice and the FBI. Common courtesy demands that Hannibal talks about Hobbs here. Jack too, even if Hannibal is sure that Will is going to supply the man with the information he wants to hear, not whatever Hannibal truly says.

Yet still, Hannibal doesn't want to talk about the Hobbs' case. There are too many things he doesn't want Will to discover yet.

“This is your time Hannibal, we can talk about anything you like,” Will speaks softly and dresses even softer. He dresses like a tired literature professor rather than a psychiatrist. He wears worn jeans and comfortable sweaters that call for Hannibal to drop his head on the doctor’s shoulder. The glasses rest over his nose and hide half of his eyes behind the thick plastic rim to make him more approachable.

It’s all a lie, but still, Will is the most beautiful thing Hannibal has ever seen.

“Have you gone fishing lately?” Hannibal asks, because it’s his time, and when it’s his time he always wants to talk about Will.

Will chuckles softly and drops his head. The glee warms his face in the softest pink, and even if the glasses slide down his nose, the mop of curls he has on his head falls over his eyes like a curtain. “Do you really want to talk about me?”

Hannibal spreads his open hands over his lap in a demure gesture. “You’re my favorite topic of conversation,” he confesses, even if it’s not a secret.

“And yet still,” Will rolls his eyes playfully. The attraction between them is not a secret, but they barely address Hannibal's, always speaking in circles around it. Beating around the bush, so to speak. Will doesn't have that kind of regard.

Will uncrosses his legs just to cross them again. It’s not a nervous gesture, he is preening. He loves Hannibal’s attention, and that is also not a secret. Another reason for them to have their sessions in Alana’s office. Their dynamic is far too compromised.

“And to answer your question, no, I haven’t. I’ve been too busy with the Hobbs case," Will says.

The wound is still raw and Will’s fingers are too cruel poking at it. Hannibal doesn’t properly flinch, he doesn’t think he even breathed differently, but he must have done something because Will’s lips twitch. Will doesn’t miss any single cue, no matter how small.

“Why don’t you tell me what you’re going to cook tonight?” Will asks because he can be remarkably cruel sometimes, with his words or with a flash of his eyes but Hannibal has never been the focus of his cruelty. Hannibal doesn’t think he could survive it, and Will is soft with him, prods at him until it hurts, but not until it maims.

Hannibal has seen Will’s capacity for cruelty with Jack and the forensics team, even with Alana once; the way he clenches his jaw and his sharp gaze turns to steel, the blue of his eyes to grey. How he sets his jaw and tilts his chin up, looking at everybody with detached apathy. How he turns colder than the harshest winter and aims his words to maim and to tear.

It’s the most wonderful sight.

“I was thinking butternut squash ravioli for the main course with a white wine sauce, and herbed mushroom pate for starters.”

“Sounds delicious,” Will says, and Hannibal waits for a moment, giving Will the opportunity to invite himself for dinner as he often does. Hannibal is surprised when Will doesn’t take the chance, and so he resumes.

“What are you dining tonight? Microwaved dinner, McDonald’s takeout, or dog food?” He asks, almost begging for Will to invite himself, offering another chance.

“Please, you know I would never steal food from the dogs,” Will says good-humorously, rolling his head. Will usually doesn’t fidget, when he rectifies his glasses is not a nervous

twitch. He tilts his head and the glasses slide down his nose, half of his pupil focuses on Hannibal over the rim, and then Hannibal notices why Will hasn't taken those chances to invite himself for dinner. Something is coming and Hannibal has time to take a deep breath just because Will waits for him before he delivers the blow. “You do realize you never say the word *meat,* right?”

“I don’t eat… meat,” Hannibal interrupts, though he has to force the word uncomfortably from his lips.

Will’s gaze sharpens and he continues unbothered. “I have heard you say pig multiple times, cow, duck, chicken. You eat eggs and you eat cheese. You just don’t eat meat, and you don’t say the word *meat* either.”

“Do you fish with fishing rods Dr. Graham, or do you spear the water?” Hannibal scowls, and Will's eyes glitter triumphally as he presses his lips together trying to contain a smile.

“I change my lure depending on what kind of fish I want to catch.”

They fall into another silence after that. Will can be cruel, but he is unusually soft with Hannibal, never pushing more than Hannibal can take and only being mildly rude when he wants to get a reaction from the man. He just got it, and now he will change the topic, redirecting it to a less bloody one.

Even though Will is still unpredictable most of the time, Hannibal has learned one or two things about him, now able to know what to expect in certain situations.

He thinks that *that* is also another manipulation from Will. Making himself approachable and easy to predict just so when he is not, Hannibal won't be expecting it.

“I’m spending time with the dogs this weekend, I think,” Will answers the question from their previous topic. “They missed me and I missed them.”

Not too kind, but kind enough. He is still prodding incessantly at Hannibal’s loneliness, but veiled. The tiniest, softer manipulation to make him speak. Hannibal doesn’t want to give him the pleasure of a reaction but it’s impossible not to. To Will’s eyes any reaction, calculated or not, speaks loudly. It’s impossible to fool him. Hannibal wonders how Matthew Brown could have been in Will’s care and still kept his extracurricular activities hidden from Will’s eyes.

Will *sees*. He tilts his head with the glee of a kid finding a Christmas-wrapped gift hidden in the back of a closet.

“What are you thinking about?” He asks, mirth clear in his voice.

“You,” Hannibal confesses.

“Thinking of killing me?” Will teases and a small smile pulls at Hannibal’s lips.

“Sometimes, but not a present,” Hannibal jokes back, and Will beams at it, smiling wide and toothy. He takes it as a compliment.

It actually is.

“And at present?”

“About Matthew Brown.”

Will’s smile fades, and he is Dr. Graham in front of Hannibal. He dips his chin down, and the glasses slide from his nose, revealing unforgiving and cruel eyes. Hannibal doesn’t know if he would prefer Will to keep his glasses or take them away. Will has terrible eyes, deep blue that seem to stare at his soul. He covers them with those cheap glasses as a nicety, to protect his mind and to offer Hannibal some reprieve from his all-seeing gaze.

“Surprises me how he got to… well, surprise you.”

“I’m not a mind reader, Hannibal,” Will sighs. He straightens his shoulders and Hannibal recognizes the line of tension on them, so similar to his own mirror. “I looked at Matthew Brown and I didn’t see a serial killer. I saw a man who wanted so desperately to be seen and cherished. I saw a man who wanted to be my friend.”

“Are you talking about Matthew Brown or about me?” Hannibal asks, and Will’s face softens.

“You *are* my friend, Hannibal.”

“I thought you were my doctor.”

“Just for the fifteen remaining minutes of your session,” Will agrees with a shrug that’s more properly him and not borrowed from Hannibal. Will pauses suddenly, considers something and he knits his brows together. “Do you want to cut it short?”

Hannibal frowns. He would prefer not to, as much as he prefers not to talk. He looks down at Will’s feet for a moment, and Will clicks his tongue sharply. Hannibal can’t resist, and his eyes snap quickly to Will’s, making the doctor chuckle.

It’s a beautiful sound, and Will always laughs so heartedly when he does it. Hannibal can’t remember *when* Will managed to train him like a dog, just that once he started he couldn’t control his reactions anymore. Will clicks his tongue and Hannibal’s eyes snap to his, and Will laughs gleefully and loudly until his cheeks are pink. The reward is worth it.

“Do you think of me as one of your strays?” Hannibal asks, just to see the fond way in which Will looks at him.

“Would you take offense if my answer is ‘yes’?”

Hannibal shakes his head. “They’re your family. I would take it as a compliment, an honor of the highest regard.”

Will’s smile widens and his whole demeanor softens. Hannibal actually feels like a cherished dog. It’s not exactly bothersome. He knows Will considers dogs above humans. To be

considered a dog from Will is *actually* a compliment. Will's fondness is real, heavy, and entirely focused on Hannibal.

It feels stupidly good.

Will leans forward on his chair, confidentially. "Don't tell your brothers, but you're my favorite," he jokes with a wink before he goes to stand up. "And I meant to cut the session short, not our talk."

Will leaves his armchair and goes to the desk. Alana has been kind enough to vacate a drawer for him that Will uses to store a bottle of whiskey. Hannibal relaxes on his own armchair, knowing that when the whiskey appears he is off the hook.

"Courtesy of the FBI?" Hannibal jokes, just to get another flash of Will's teeth.

"Jack can rot in hell for all I care, but the FBI money is good."

Will brings one glass to Hannibal and goes to turn off the ceiling light, leaving them in the absolute darkness of the office before he turns on a lamp. The office feels smaller like this, more intimate. Will is actually quite dedicated to destroying any wall Hannibal tries to build between them. "Now that I'm back being your friend," he says, pulling his glasses off and placing them in the pocket of his flannel shirt under the cream-colored sweater. "As a psychiatrist, sometimes I have to sugarcoat the things I say…"

"You? Sugarcoat?" Hannibal interrupts, because he knows Will likes it when he teases.

"At times," Will concedes with a shrug. "But as your friend… Do I have your permission to be more…"

"Blunt?" Hannibal offers.

"My word of choice was 'an ass'."

Hannibal makes a gesture with his hand, giving him a pass. Will doesn't sit back on his mismatched armchair and instead goes to Hannibal's, sitting on the armrest, legs crossed and playing with his glass of whiskey. "You're a psychopath, so, asking you how you feel about Abigail would be a fairly stupid approach. So I'll save my breath and instead, I'll go directly to the point: Do you see yourself in Abigail or do you see somebody else?"

Any reaction is a reaction, even if Will has his eyes focused on his glass. Hannibal's silence, the number of seconds it takes him to answer, and the pitch of his breath have already told Will more things than Hannibal can comprehend. Hannibal's best approach is to smash Will's head against the closest wall and hope to induce memory loss or a concussion so he can flee the country. The second best, and sadly less dramatic, is to be honest. The only plus to that choice is that Will won't be damaged. The downside to that is that he won't be able to grasp those exquisite curls Will has.

"I see parts of myself in her, I also see parts of…" he pauses, and shakes his head. Honesty is overrated. Thinking about it from a different angle, if he smashes Will's head, he could touch

his curls…

Will puts his hand, heavy and warm, on Hannibal's shoulder and Hannibal feels like his brain has suddenly come to a stop.

"I'll stroke you Savior Complex here for a second–"

"I have a Savior Complex?" Hannibal asks, half perplexed by the idea and the other half by the weight of Will's hand.

Tsk.

Hannibal's eyes snap to Will's.

"Yes, you do," Will says with the same fond smile he makes every time he clicks his tongue, squeezing Hannibal's shoulder as a muted apology. "Not as big as your ego, but yes. Your PTSD takes that shape because you refuse to accept your trauma."

"I'm not–" Hannibal stutters, trying to contradict him and he is again shut off by the look Will levels at him.

"Hannibal," he says, and Hannibal stops. Will leans towards him, curling his arm around Hannibal's shoulders and resting his head on top of Hannibal. He is very warm and every spot of Hannibal's skin that is in contact with Will's burns. Hannibal feels his own body tensing, and not knowing how to properly react to the contact he grips his own glass painfully tight.

Will sighs heavily, resting more of his weight on top of him. Hannibal can't move. He feels Will's fingers making lazy shapeless strokes on his shoulder and the contact is maddening. It stings behind his eyes, it aches inside his chest.

"Hannibal, you saved Abigail," Will whispers kindly. "You didn't get to save whoever you wanted to save, but you survived, and you got to save Abigail. Stop beating yourself up for it. You were a child, and you did what you could. It's enough."

Hannibal stays still.

Will knows an incredible amount of things about Hannibal's psyche. More than Hannibal knows about himself, and more than he feels comfortable with Will knowing. He knows more of Hannibal's past than he should.

Will never states any of his knowledge out loud, but it's there, and he always lets Hannibal know that he knows. Will keeps saying that he is not a mind reader, and of course, there's no such thing. But if there was such a thing as a mind reader, Will would be the closest.

Will shows his knowledge of Hannibal in the bluntest ways that still give him plausible deniability. If Hannibal were to grab him now, push him against a wall, and force him to tell him how he knows, what he knows, Will could lie, and there would be no way for Hannibal to know.

Will knows, and he is often kind about it, but he is as gentle as a brick breaking a window. He is not climbing walls or picking locks, he is demolishing Hannibal's barriers and stumbling all over Hannibal's mind like it belongs to him. Kicking doors open until he finds where Hannibal is hiding.

Eventually, Hannibal knows, Will is going to kick the correct door and find him.

"They say extreme arts of cruelty require a high level of empathy," Hannibal comments in a whisper that matches Will's, and Will flickers his ear playfully with his fingers.

"Are you calling me cruel, Hannibal?"

"You *are* cruel, Will."

Will shifts, but he doesn't leave Hannibal's side. He keeps his arm on Hannibal's shoulder, his body pressed against Hannibal's. He moves only enough to be able to drink his whiskey. "Have you ever considered becoming a psychiatrist?"

He means it teasing. He pokes as much as Hannibal can stand it, and retreats. His thumb strokes Hannibal's neck as an apology, the patch of skin that he can reach and Hannibal relaxes, leaning into the touch. He is comfortable enough to joke. "Are you aware of the phenomenon of transference in therapy?"

Will laughs at that, cheerful and warm. Hannibal can feel every vibration at his side, and he wants to wrap one arm around Will's waist, bring him to his lap, and feel the man's laugh vibrate against his lips.

"Please *Dr. Lecter* enlighten me about transference, is not like I have a degree in psychology or anything," he jokes, shifting on the armrest to sit closer to Hannibal, and Hannibal shakes his head.

"I considered medicine at some point," Hannibal tells him instead, answering Will's previous question. He focuses his eyes on his own hands now that he can. He doesn't want to fidget, but he moves his fingers. Will's hand is warm on his shoulder. A part of him wants to touch Will. Another wants to keep at least one barrier between them.

Will is undoubtedly cruel. He sees far too much and he doesn't let anything interfere with him getting what he wants. "Which specialization?" He asks nonchalantly as he takes Hannibal's glass from his fingers and puts it away on the floor. He returns to his place with fluid movements and grabs Hannibal's recently freed hand, putting it on his crossed thigh.

"Surgery," Hannibal says because it's all he can do. His eyes focused on his own hand resting on top of Will's thigh.

Will whistles. "Is that your Savior Complex or your God Complex?" He asks softly, brushing away a lock of hair where it falls over Hannibal's eyes, and Hannibal forces himself not to look at those eyes as if it could save him from Will's gaze.

"You tell me, you're my psychiatrist."

Will shakes his head but doesn't say anything more. Another small manipulation. He won't speak anymore until Hannibal does. It's not done out of kindness or a reward. He will force Hannibal to acknowledge their touch, to change the topic, or to leave.

Hannibal breaks after seven ticks of Alana's clock.

"I was thinking about visiting Abigail at the hospital."

Change of topic it is.

Will makes a curious sound, but he doesn't stop the strokes of his fingers on Hannibal's neck. Nothing shakes him, but when he speaks he sounds slightly surprised. Hannibal prides himself on managing to surprise him. It's an actual feat.

"Do you want me to dissuade you or encourage you?" Will asks without judgment. He will actually do whatever Hannibal chooses.

"I was thinking I wanted you to come with me," Hannibal says instead, turning his face to look at the doctor, and his chest fills with pride when Will lifts both his brows in surprise, opening his eyes so wide Hannibal can appreciate the irises in their entirety, surrounded by white flesh. "If you were amenable to it, of course," Hannibal concedes.

"I'm good with dogs, not with kids," Will says, always trying to be difficult.

"She is in a coma. You won't have to talk."

"I hate hospitals."

"Stop fishing," Hannibal scolds playfully. He feels bold, and Will's small grin makes him bolder. He squeezes Will's thigh with his hand and Will's beautiful eyes sparkle. "I won't say *please."*

Will opens his mouth, but he quickly snaps it closed. Whatever he was about to say, he must have deemed too much even for their very unprofessional relationship.

"All right, I'll go," Will says with a suffering tone that it's completely faked.

The clock tics many times more after that until another hour has passed.

It's late and outside is dark. Hannibal will get home in time to begin dinner. He tries to feel bad about knowing that Will has two hours of driving before he arrives at Wolf Trap, but there's not much success. He has spent three hours in Will's presence, and he wishes he could spend many more.

"May I ask you a question?" Hannibal asks, standing under the door frame of Alana's office. Will's hands hover over the light switch on the wall, and his eyes over Hannibal's figure. "If I

am your only patient, why do you see me so late? I can come earlier, and I'm sure Alana won't mind."

Will grins. It's something with too many teeth, far too dangerous. He switches the light off and sags towards Hannibal, resting his hand on Hannibal's jacket, close enough to Hannibal's heart.

"Because winter is close, darlin'," he drawls mockingly sweetly, running the back of his fingers over Hannibal's chest, slipping them under the lapels of the profiler's jacket. He is kind enough to lower his eyes, and cruel enough to focus them on Hannibal's mouth. "I'm hoping that one day it will snow so hard that I'll have no option but to stay for the night in Baltimore, and my dear friend, agent Hannibal Lecter will feel so bad for poor ol' me that he will invite me to have dinner with him and spend the night at his place."

"I don't have a guest room, Will," Hannibal tells him, though he knows it will make no difference. When Will wants something, he won't stop until he gets it.

Will clicks his tongue, and when their eyes meet, he is smiling wide and proud of himself.

"I'm counting on that."

[x]

Hannibal arrives at his house with a sigh and with Will Graham in his mind, as it has been his usual Thursday routine for the last four weeks.

The house is empty and that makes him think of Will. Makes him think of Will's home, lived in and warm and cozy, so dissimilar to the emptiness of his own. When Will arrives at his house he will be received by the wagging tails of his dogs. Hannibal is received only by the tic of the clock.

He thinks of Will's dogs, of Will's house. He thinks of Will. He thinks that if he stepped into Will's house and in Will's arms, he would never want to leave.

Hannibal makes dinner. A humble affair. It's enough to fill him, but he doesn't indulge in making more than he can eat. He eats in silence, thinking about Will's renewed invitation to dinner that Hannibal has rejected once again.

He showers and he dresses for bed, and he keeps thinking about Will.

He thinks of the ring of Will's laugh and the pink color of his cheeks. He thinks of the warmth of his body and the weight of his hand on his, the flex of the muscle of his thigh under Hannibal's hand, how his hand covered the curve of it. He thinks of that atrocious aftershave that Will forgoes to use every Thursday, and wears instead the scent of his shampoo and his bare skin, the freshness of Wolf Trap, and the clinging smell of the dogs.

Hannibal lies on his bed, limbs spread and fisting the sheets, forcing his eyes closed and his hands to stay away from his hard cock, begging his pounding heart to *please* settle down.

He thinks about the way Will drawls the word *darlin',* knowing very well what it does to Hannibal's resolve.

Hannibal tries to control his breathing as he thinks about Will, about Will's words, about Will's desire.

Will's words ricochet around his mind. Hannibal doesn't have Will's overactive imagination, but the scene is clear and vivid in his mind like a painting.

A bed of snow outside, the night pitch dark like tar. Dimmed lights and a hearty dinner. Fire cracking and wind howling, perhaps some ambient music. Will's moans against his ear. Will's hands are on his body, Will's warm body is under him, over him, around him. Will's mouth, wet and burning hot, is on his.

Hannibal’s body begs to let Will hold his hand and drag him to bed. His mind reminds him that it cannot be and that he needs to control himself. His heart gallops inside his chest, furious and envious and demanding.

Hannibal breathes, thinks of Will, keeps his hands away from himself. He forces himself to sleep, knowing very well that he won't get much rest and that he will eventually wake up in the middle of the night, chased by Will's mirage instead of nightmares.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter on Thursday! 🥰 there's a chance for a double update next week 👀

Parental Figures

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will told Hannibal he was glad Abigail had woken up from her coma. He doesn't actually look as glad as he swore he was, but nonetheless, he remains faithfully at Hannibal's side at all times while they're with Abigail.

Abigail is still weak due to the many days she spent in an induced coma. Her throat is scarred but not too terribly ugly, her mind is the one that took the worst part of it after all.

She walks slowly now, her fragile hand clinging to Hannibal's arm as they walk through the hospital greenhouse. She breathes heavily and hoarsely, and every breath comes out with a whistle. It reminds Hannibal of Mischa's lungs laced with pneumonia on her last days.

Hannibal's brain is cruel and he cannot stop finding similarities between her and Mischa. The way Abigail clings to him, the way she breathes, her big and scared eyes always searching for Hannibal's. The innocence of youth, the rosy color of her cheeks, and the horror that haunts her.

Luckily, that's where all the similarities end, and unluckily, where her similarities with Hannibal begin.

She is alive. She has committed heinous acts to be. She knows how human flesh tastes. It's somehow relieving to meet someone who has the same damning knowledge as him and is terrible at the same time. Hannibal wishes she could have been spared of it, while another part of him, dark and egoist, relishes that she exists.

The traits that could make her a Lecter end there though, for better or for worse. Hannibal hasn't decided which one it is yet.

Then starts the things that make her undoubtedly a Hobbs. Her button-like nose and the shape of her dry, bitten lips. Her hair that is thin and straight, darker than Hannibal's. Her baby-blue eyes that Hannibal doesn't doubt resemble her father's, even if Hannibal only got to see them clouded by death. She must look something like her father, even though she also wears a certain, curious resemblance to Will, with her porcelain skin, pink lips, and baby-blue eyes. But the similarities also stop there, only in the physical. Where she shares similarities with Hannibal on the soul and the psyche, she shares similarities with Will in the physical.

It's curious. Feels like some mean joke from a higher power.

"There was plenty wrong with your father, Abigail," Will tells her, having slipped on the role of psychiatrist easily since the moment he saw Abigail awake. For both their sakes, Hannibal supposes – for Abigail's, so she can have someone to talk with, and for Will, to not have to engage in friendly conversation.

Will is not touching her, but he walks slowly by Hannibal's side and sharp blue eyes find Hannibal for a single moment, when he says, for both, Abigail and him, "But there's nothing wrong with you."

And then they're gone again, resting on Abigail's weak form as Hannibal helps her sit down on the bench.

"You said he was loving. I believe it. That's what you brought out in him," Will finishes, standing in front of her as Hannibal sits warily by her side. Will has slipped into his psychiatrist role, and it's incredible to see the way he changes so easily. Hannibal almost doesn't recognize him without the venom spilling from his tongue and his sassy attitude. His voice is soft and kind, in the same way someone talks to an old, beloved family pet; he seems to speak to the whole world like that.

"That's not all I brought out in him," the words spill from Abigail, tinted with guilt. Her whole body leans forward by the weight of it, following the line of her gaze toward her shoes, and Hannibal has to hold her by the shoulders to keep her from falling off the bench.

Her words are almost a confession. In the time she has spent in her coma and in the mental hospital, she has had very little time to learn about her father's crimes by another person. The information is there, and this is the moment a good agent would use to pull some information from her. They both should ask her if she knew about the girls.

Will must have caught her slip too, because he quickly puts a hand on Hannibal's shoulder, and discreetly shakes his head.

Not now.

Hannibal releases a relieved sigh, and brings Abigail closer to him, wrapping one arm around her shoulders. They will leave the questioning for another day. Thankfully.

"I'm going to be messed up, aren't I?" She asks, voice wet and shaking. Her irises distort from perfect circles to wobbly shapes, and the white around them is tinted with a rabid pink. "I'm worried about nightmares."

"We'll help you with the nightmares," Hannibal quickly reassures her, squeezing her shoulder. "There's no such thing as getting used to what you experienced, but we'll be here for you." Hannibal raises his eyes to Will, finding the man tilting his head curiously to the side and lifting a brow. Only then Hannibal realizes his own slip, speaking about them both, promising Abigail his and Will's support without having asked first, assuming Will's participation.

Will's eyes wrinkle in the corner when he smiles, and the blue irises seem to glint with amusement. He has a lot of fun watching Hannibal's internal struggle, but as usual, he is kind, and he quickly nods once, accepting and promising to stay. They will take care of her together.

Calmer now that he has Will on his side, Hannibal returns his eyes to Abigail. "I worry about nightmares, too," he confesses, watching how her eyes widen.

"Do you have nightmares?"

"All the time. Sometimes it feels like I cannot dream of anything else."

Abigail seems to think about it for a moment, nodding out of acknowledgment of the words rather than of understanding.

“Can I ask you a question?” She mutters with a painful wheeze, turning shyly to look at Will for a short moment.

When she woke up, sje panicked and ended up hurting herself, pulling the tubes from her throat and forever damaging her larynx – she panics now too and lowers her gaze.

Hannibal understands. Looking Will in the eyes is a terrible feat.

“Of course, Abigail,” Hannibal tells her, squeezing her fragile hand. “You can ask me anything you want.”

She has doe eyes, round and wide. She could easily be mistaken for Will’s daughter if Will felt inclined to lie and nobody would question it. Though there’s a slight difference in their eyes. Will’s are sharp and diamond cut, all-seeing, boring holes in the soul of the poor fool that has been unlucky enough to find themselves under his gaze. It makes Will look like a god at best, like the devil at worst.

(Hannibal wonders, only for a second, which one would Will prefer to be.)

“Will you be honest with me? Totally honest?” Abigail’s eyes, on the contrary, are wide and round and delicate. She looks like a deer in the middle of the road, staring into headlights, waiting for the oncoming truck. She holds Hannibal’s hand tightly, begging him for this.

He nods again, trying to be reassuring when he puts his other hand on top of her and feels her shaking.

She risks another glance toward Will, and she doesn't get to reach the doctor's eyes before she returns her gaze toward Hannibal's.

“Killing somebody, even if you have to do it, does it feel that bad?”

Hannibal takes on her words for a moment. He can't properly hear the movement of Will’s eyes, but he can definitely feel how they bore into him.

Hannibal takes on Abigail, glad that her similarities with Mischa fall short of the physical, he could have never been able to lie to her. He is also glad that Abigail’s similarities with Will end on the physical, and she doesn’t share the cut of his eyes. He doesn’t think anybody has ever been able to lie to Will.

“It’s the ugliest thing in the world.”

Hannibal doesn’t want to look at Will, knowing that the doctor is aware he’s not telling the whole truth. Will doesn’t make a sound, doesn’t utter a word, but he shifts his weight, his

eyes still fixated on Hannibal.

He *knows*.

Something to talk about on their next session, Hannibal guesses.

[x]

Freddie Lounds leans on the hood of Hannibal's second-hand bought Bentley, waiting.

Hannibal has had none of actual interaction with her, but as it happen to anyone who works in the FBI, he could recognize the scarlet shade of her hair and her cheap perm anywhere in the world. She spots Hannibal and Will as they approach and quickly stands, almost respectfully and clearly excited while she takes hurried steps to meet them.

"Agent Lecter, I never formally introduced myself," she says offering a gloved hand in his direction. She sways her hair over her shoulder with the movement of her head, sending a powerful wave of strong perfume mixed with hairspray toward Hannibal's nose. "I'm Freddie Lounds."

Hannibal takes her hand, of course, it would be rude not to.

"Pleasure to meet you, Miss Lounds," he lies through his teeth, faking a convincing smile that she returns almost just as convincing. She then turns to Will and the respectful attitude flies away.

"And how's my favorite pile of gold?" She teases with a grin, knowing better than to approach Will further.

"What are you doing here Freddie? Chasing blood?" Will asks with no regard for common courtesy, as he always does, hands in his pockets, sass on his tone and a confident lean on his body.

Freddie Lounds doesn't seems faced by it. Years of dealing with Will Graham has thickened her skin.

"Chasing you, actually. Will it kill you to check your phone once in a while?"

"I actually blocked your number."

"Ha-ha," Freddie deadpans, used to him and his dry humor. She sighs, and the teasing tone disappears from her as she clasps her hands in front of her, shrugging her heavy handbag up her shoulder. "I've been writing about Garret Jacob Hobbs as you must know. I've spoken to relatives of his other victims," she says seriously, eyeing Hannibal only once before returning her gaze to Will. "And one of them stands out, I thought you should know."

She says *you* in a way that is meant to imply *Will,* but also that it doesn't bother her that Hannibal is also present.

"Who?" Hannibal asks, inserting himself in the conversation.

"A man named Nicholas Boyle. Brother of Cassie Boyle. He has very strong opinions about Hobbs father... and daughter," she comments idly, savouring the way the words roll on her tongue. She shifts from serious to gloating just as quickly as Will does, but she is not even half as good at it as he is. "Speaking of Abigail, how is she?" She asks with a mockingly, too sweet voice that tries to sound worried and it's clearly not.

"Freddie, tone it down," Will tells her, and tilts his chin up in a skeptical way. His glasses slide down his nose and Hannibal watches how Freddie flinches when his gaze rests on her. "How did you know I was here?"

Credit where credit is due. Freddie flinches but she doesn't avoid Will's eyes, and remains proudly looking him straight in the eyes. Hannibal feels some degree of respect in that.

"Do I really need to answer?" She snarls annoyed at him as she drops the line of her shoulders, waving her hair again. "I came for Abigail. I was just lucky you were here," she confesses.

Will scoffs, and it's clear to Hannibal that what is between them is not a friendly relationship or even a relationship built on mutual respect. A business relationship and shared convenience, and nothing else.

"Let's go," Will says to Hannibal as he leads the way to Hannibal's Bentley, and Freddie follows, quickly trotting behind them.

"Look, you and I may have our own reasons for being here, but I also think we both genuinely care about what happens to Abigail Hobbs."

"Do you?" Hannibal asks skeptical and she has no time to come up with a lie before Will intercedes between them again.

"Freddie only cares about online ad sales," he says, ignoring her altogether and using the moment to slip his hand on the crook of Hannibal's shoulder to drag him away.

"My online ad sales are what cleaned your reputation and helped your case, Will," she protests as she circles in front of them cutting their path.

Hannibal and Will come to a stop just a few steps away from Hannibal's Bentley, and Will leans closer to him, fitting his arm more comfortably around Hannibal's.

Freddie eyes the action with her scrutinizing eyes for a second, but quickly discards the sight to continue speaking.

"I can do the same for Abigail. The press is already marketing her as *The Evil's Spawn.* How's Jack Crawford calling her? Surely you won't let her go through the same treatment Jack pushed you through, right Will?"

That seems finally to give Will pause and he considers it.

Freddie doesn't have Will's sharp mind, but she has sharpened her eyes with time, experience, and cynism, training them to quickly recognize an opening when it presents itself.

"She can tell her own story, with my help. Have a strong foundation to grow, people to have her back. She is an orphan now," Freddie reminds them. "She could use the regalies of the book until she can get on her feet."

"Ninety percent of the regalies for Abigail," Will says shamelessly, making Freddie frown.

"Sixty," Freddie rebutes equally shameless. "Do you think money grows on trees, Will?"

"I'm sorry Freddie, I thought you were doing this out of the goodness of your heart. Eighty-five."

"At least I have a heart, unlike you. Good intentions don't pay my bills, and us the common mortals don't have a bank account full of FBI money. Sixty-five."

"No, my book pays your bills. Eighty."

"Seventy-eight percent. I'll get the ad revenue and the rights for a documental series will be shared with me."

Will looks at her for a long moment, analizing Freddie with his eerie eyes. She stays still, bearing the scrutiny with strength, and Hannibal has to commend her for that.

It seems that Will deems it a good deal, or that he will be unable to get a better deal for Abigail, and so he turns his eyes away from Freddie and looks at Hannibal instead. He doesn't say anything, but Hannibal understands he is waiting for his opinion. They're taking care of Abigail together after all.

"We'll talk about it," Hannibal says to Freddie.

"And we'll bring the idea to Abigail, see what she thinks about it," Will adds, siding with Hannibal as he often does, making an united front against the world. "But don't get to the hospital without me, and don't start writing anything yet."

Freddie smiles at them, content with her victory.

"Anything else?" Will asks bluntly, and the glee in Freddie's eyes disappears, replaced with a honestly serious tone when she speaks.

"Yes, you really should run a background check on Boyle," she tells Hannibal before returning her gaze to Will and some leftover teasing returns. "I sent you the recording of our conversation, you may want to listen to it."

"Transcribe it, I don't want to hear your voice, I've had enough for the month," Will says waving a hand indistinctly in the air while he rest his tired head on Hannibal's shoulder.

"Isn't he such a sweetheart?" Freddie tells Hannibal with a sarcastic, disbelieving scoff. Then, again, starts a new conversation with Will. "Also, I sent you my next article about Hobbs, can you work your magic?

"I'll have it in two days," he says, though he doesn't sound excited about working any magic.

"You're the best," Freddie tells him, and actually truly means it, even if she tries to sneak as much of passive-agression into her forced smile. She opens her handback and searches for a personal card that pushes in Hannibal's direction. "Agent Lecter, if you need anything give me call, any friend of Will really needs better friends."

She leaves in another flourish of red hair that leaves behind an atrocious wave of hairspray and perfume. Meanwhile, Will's eyes follow her as she steps into her car, making sure Freddie doesn't sneak into the hospital.

"You work for tattlecrime?" Hannibal asks curiously and only half teasing, earning a soft scoff from Will as they resume walking arm in arm.

"I make sure she doesn't write nonsense, you have no idea the theories I had to read about serial killers," he says with an exaggerated roll of his eyes. "And if you ever read *an anonymous source close to the FBI,* I swear is not me. I'm quoted always only as *an anonymous source."*

Will runs idly his hand over Hannibal's arms, stroking the muscles appreciatively and lewdly. As always, teasing, confident and shameless.

"Now, do you want to grab a coffee and discuss Abigail's novelist career?"

Hannibal should say no. They should discuss it with Abigail. They should turn around and come back to the hospital. He should take his arm away from Will's grasp.

But there is a coffee shop Hannibal always wanted to enter and always refrained from doing it.

And the idea of spending more time with Will, and having the doctor's hand on him is too good to pass.

"Lead the way."

[x]

It's Thursday now, and Alana's plastic clock ticks on her desk. The sound echoes on her beige walls marking forty minutes of silence after 7 p.m.

Will looks smug and self-satisfied as he always does. Is a good look at him. Hannibal wishes he could see Will's laughing eyes without the barrier of his glasses, no matter how unnerving they are.

Will remains silent, waiting patiently for Hannibal to speak. His eyes are laughing and his smile is the only thing protecting Hannibal from the sharp words trapped inside the doctor's mouth.

They both know Hannibal is about to break and say out loud what Will knows already but has been patiently waiting to hear. Hannibal feels hot all over, like a roast that has been in the oven for long enough, with Will peeking absently inside from time to time, just to check if Hannibal's ready.

Hannibal's skin feels clammy, his palms slightly sweaty with the burning blood turning into juice. Hannibal doesn't remember, in all his adult life, to have felt so incredibly out of his depth, so scared, so unnerved. Will is doing nothing, saying nothing, he is just waiting, *looking,* and it still feels like Will is pulling a thread, tensing it slowly until it can't take it anymore, and Hannibal snaps.

The office is too bright. Hannibal wishes the lights were off.

"I had a sister," Hannibal confesses, unprompted.

Will nods as he stands up. His smile was wider a second ago, now it softens, but Hannibal knows that Will is grinning on the inside. He is just putting on a mask for Hannibal's sake. Kind, thoughtful, gentle like any psychiatrist should be.

"Does Abigail remind you of her?" Will asks absently as he goes to switch the ceiling light off, giving Hannibal his back as he speaks and sets them into darkness for a moment.

It's meant as a kindness, like a moment of reprieve from those unforgiving eyes, but Hannibal is no fool. He knows that Will is as all-seeing in the dark as he is in the light. Will is not a mind reader, but to think of something in Will's presence is as effective and dangerous as to make a wish to a monkey's paw.

Still, being cast into darkness makes it easier to continue. Better, perhaps, in the darkness. More fitting.

There was a reason why confessions are always done hiding one's face.

"Sometimes… Mischa was my charge, more of a daughter than my sister." Will turns on the lamplight in the farthest corner. Another kindness, enough light for him to return to his seat, enough to see each other, but dark enough for Hannibal to be less seen. Not that it makes a difference with Will in the room, but it's enough of a concession.

“I never resented my parents for that, I enjoyed it greatly,” Hannibal continues, following Will’s form as the doctor sits back in front of him, eyes hidden behind glasses, gaze dropped low to Hannibal’s feet. He is kind. Hannibal sighs. “Sometimes I find myself missing fatherhood, wondering if I could be a good father.”

Will hums, but doesn’t say anything else. Hannibal levels him a look in his direction, half irritated, and half playful.

“Go on, you may fish,” he says, making Will chuckle.

“May I stab the water with a spear?”

“By all means.”

“Do you see Abigail as your daughter?”

Hannibal pouts goodheartedly. “You can do better than that.”

Will shrugs, looking away. “Wording it differently would be rude, and you abhor rudeness.”

“When has it ever stopped you?” Hannibal counters, and Will acquaintances with another lazy shrug.

“I didn’t want to sour this lovely moment of vulnerability.”

Hannibal doesn’t say anything else, but he levels another look at Will, a tad more irritated, but still in good humor. Will uncrosses his legs, crosses it again, and licks his lips. His glasses slid down the beautiful arch of his nose. His eyes glisten as he pushes the glasses back in place with a finger. He tilts his head, grabs a spear, and aims…

“How much does Abigail remind you of… *Mischa,”* Will takes his time to say his sister’s name, knowing well that he is holding something sacred in his mouth. He treats Mischa’s name more dearly and more carefully than Hannibal has treated her flesh. Then he tilts his head to the other side and he returns to his teasing and smug self, “And how much does she remind you of yourself?”

Hannibal takes a deep breath. He can feel blood slipping through a wound on his leg from Will’s spear.

(He is kind, he could have aimed for Hannibal’s heart.)

(He is cruel. He is bleeding Hannibal little by little.)

“Less than you would expect, and more than I’m comfortable accepting, in that order,” Hannibal says, rolling his shoulders to relieve some tension. He reminds himself that there’s no real wound on his leg. He can escape this conversation if he wants. He isn’t sure if he wants to, but he can redirect it to something that will catch Will’s teeth, and that will distract the doctor from Hannibal’s neck. “Abigail also reminds me slightly of you.”

That surprises Will, and Hannibal notices a surge of pride taking *him* by surprise. His eyes drop to the grin that curls Will's lips and the soft blush that creeps on the doctor's cheeks. The intimate lighting does nothing to hide it, and warmth pools in Hannibal's stomach, suddenly feeling cornered, now that he realizes what he has just confessed.

"That's… a very interesting line of thought," Will says, licking his lips and looking over the rim of his glasses, eyes flickering all over Hannibal. "You, Abigail, fatherhood, and… me."

"Is it really?" Hannibal asks, growing agitated. Will is not blind, and he pushes incessantly at Hannibal. He says it like he doesn't know what he does to Hannibal's resolve and how much effort it takes Hannibal to deny him again and again. "Don't play coy, Will."

Will makes an overly exaggerated sigh. He stands up again and heads directly to the desk. "Curious? Yes. Surprising? Maybe not that much, but I'm still flattered."

Hannibal knows the bottle of whiskey is about to join them when Will kneels to open the locked drawer that belongs to him, just as much as he knows that Will is about to make a flirty comment.

"I must ask, in this charming scenario, do you see us only as Abigail's parents, or parents to any children?" He pauses as he raises again, holding the two glasses and the whiskey. He returns to Hannibal's side with the two glasses full – Will's always fuller and extends one of them to Hannibal before snapping it away. His eyes sharpen. "Or does the act of *making children* play a role in this fantasy too?"

"Crass, Will, even for you," Hannibal chides him, trying to sound irritated or stern and failing on both.

Will moves without a care in the world, and deposits Hannibal's glass on the desk. "Is fairly common for a patient to feel sexual attraction to his psychiatrist," he says as he returns to nurse at his own drink, sitting on Alana's desk, legs spread wide and hanging a few inches from the floor. Hannibal's eyes trail over the man's thighs, following the rim of his dark jeans as it has turned to be his usual routine every time Will spreads open for him.

Everything that Will does looks like it is done carelessly, but his actions rarely are. Everything he does is thought of, careless to a carefully millimetric degree. Hannibal's glass is on the desk at his side, touching the outer side of Will's leg. If Hannibal wants to take a sip he will have to lean forward, and to grab it – inadvertently, he will have to touch Will.

"Is it common for a psychiatrist to feel sexual attraction towards his patient?" Hannibal counters, clasping his hands over his own lap.

They both share a smile. Hannibal is the one that usually ignores the elephant in the room, and sometimes beats around the bush. Will is never shy in his approach, or to show his desires plainly.

"It's not uncommon," Will agrees.

Hannibal feels wanted, and it's at times too much. The thing that bothers him the most is that he doesn't want it to stop. He wants Will's attention, and he wants to state his desires plainly as Will does, and wants to touch Will with an intensity that shakes him at his core. And he has to clasp his hands on his lap and make a conscious effort to keep them there. Another effort to keep his mind focused on the conversation and not fantasize about how firm the flesh of Will's thighs are. What would Will do if Hannibal were to bypass the drink right now, and were to drag his hands over Will's thighs? How they would feel under his hands? Would he spread them further or would he wrap them around Hannibal's waist?

"I'll answer your question when the hour is finished," Hannibal says. He can admit his desire for Will, he *will,* at some point. He won't act on it though. It's better to keep Will at arm's length, enjoy it while it lasts. Hannibal doesn't know if he'll be able to control himself if they fall in bed together, and doesn't know what would become of him if Will gives him his attention just to take it back.

And take it back he will, because Hannibal knows he is a monster. And monsters cannot be loved.

"I'll hold you to that," Will grins, taking a sip of his drink.

"I know you will."

They fall into silence again. Will is teasing and smug and rude but he is a good psychiatrist when he isn't flirting with his patient. Their relationship is as unprofessional as it can be, but Will still takes it seriously when Hannibal needs him to.

He has successfully held Hannibal over the tempest of vulnerability and made the conversation flow easily. Dimmed the lights, respected Hannibal's time, and took care of Mischa's memory. He also manipulated his way into trying to have Hannibal touch him, but that's a sin that Hannibal will absolutely forgive.

And as easily as he had turned the solemn conversation into playful teasing, he turns it again, back to the eye of the storm.

"Be it with Abigail or not, Hannibal," Will says gently, eyes kind and half-hidden behind glasses and long curls, sharp grin and sharp tongue hidden behind a glass of whiskey. "I would be honored to share a child with you. I think you would make a very decent father."

Hannibal chuckles and shakes his head. Not *good,* but *very decent.* Will doesn't lie, and it's appreciated.

Will tilts his head to the side, looking adoringly at Hannibal. He shakes his head too, and leaves his glass on Alana's desk, walking the short distance between them and putting a reassuring hand on Hannibal's shoulder.

"We may not be and never will be Abigail's parents, but we can take care of her, together," he says, and he means it. Is a beautiful thought that Hannibal doesn't deserve, and doesn't want to allow to appear in his mind. "If you want to."

Hannibal shouldn't allow it to appear in his mind, but Will's voice and scent and warmth lull him into a sense of peace. Plants in his mind the idea that *maybe,* maybe they could. Maybe Hannibal could be deserving of a family, of Will's love, of Will.

"I would like that," Hannibal confesses softly. He is not familiar with the joy bubbling inside of him, the warmth spreading through his body. He is familiar with Will's hand on his shoulder and Will's gaze on him, but just because he is familiar with it, doesn't make it more bearable.

Hannibal takes a deep breath and fixes his own eyes on the familiar color of whiskey on the desk. He isn't used to alcohol as Will is, much less strong drinks. Everything Hannibal does is done carefully, in measures he thinks are allowed. He doesn't drink often and eats as little and as much as he needs. Never overindulges in any pleasure.

"I lied to Abigail," Hannibal admits. He doesn't feel guilt. He actually can't, but he imagines a good man should.

"Is this our first parental talk?" Will teases, shaking Hannibal from the sudden darkness he has fallen into. Hannibal even manages a surprised, honest chuckle. Will's eyes wrinkle like they sometimes do when he is amused. He sees straight past Hannibal, and voices whatever Hannibal doesn't dare to. "Parents lie to their children all the time. Sometimes to protect them or to calm them. Sometimes to make them happy. Nobody questions a parent that lies about how hungry they are so their child has more food on their plate."

Will shares very little of his past, and never in an obvious way. But there are clues here and there, like bread crumbs that Hannibal follows carefully. He can imagine a small child with blue eyes and dark curls who sees too much, fighting against his father because he *knows* when the man is lying.

"Nobody questions a parent that lies how a present got under a tree," Will continues, mingling breadcrumbs of his actual past within his words, some very vulnerable and not so obvious, and some exaggerated but not less truthful. " *'Don' eat watermelon seeds, Willy boy, or you're gonna get a plant growin' in your tummy.'"*

Hannibal laughs then. Will's southern drawl slips sometimes in his speech, but never too pronounced. He uses it sparingly when he wants to be charming or annoying, especially when he is around Hannibal. But this little sentence is a flash of his past, offered to Hannibal in exchange for his.

Will's eyes sparkle, and he smiles again, looking so adoringly at Hannibal that Hannibal finds that he wants to drown in his eyes and hide away at the same time.

And then, he has look for too long, and he gets cut.

"What did you lie to Abigail about?"

Hannibal swallows as his smile dies out. He wants to fidget. He wants to drink the whiskey. Wants to leave. Wants to touch Will. Wants to spill his guts in front of Will. Wants Will to love him, for everything he is and for everything he is not.

“Who are you now? My doctor or my friend?” Hannibal asks, pushing away the confession for another moment. His skin is too tight. He feels about to burst. He won’t be able to keep the words inside him much longer.

“I’m the father of our daughter,” Will says. The tone is teasing, but there are no traces of a joke. Just plain honesty. He means it.

Hannibal *wants*.

Will moves, slowly, carefully, in front of him. Hannibal keeps his eyes on the beige carpet under his feet, waiting for the moment Will will click his tongue and force Hannibal’s eyes to his.

“Who do you need right now?" Will asks softly, kindly. "I’ll be whoever you need me to be, Hannibal.”

There’s no click of Will’s tongue, just the echoing sound of Hannibal’s throat working as he swallows his own saliva, trying to keep the words inside his mouth a second longer.

“The Will Graham who won’t tell Jack Crawford what I’m about to say.”

Will takes off his glasses, Hannibal notices, leaving them on the desk behind him. He crouches in front of Hannibal, searching for maroon eyes that won’t look straight at him until he gets an answer.

“You have Will Graham, your friend,” he says, resting his free, warm and heavy hand on Hannibal’s knee, squeezing around the bone. With the other, he holds his own whiskey between loose fingers. “Although whatever Will would have worked just the same, fuck Jack.”

It brings a soft smile to Hannibal’s lips, and he tentatively lifts his gaze. First to Will’s hand holding the glass, then to his throat. Hannibal trails his eyes upper still, towards the sharp jaw until they settle onto the sharper eyes.

He is excited, Hannibal notices.

The room feels cold, eerily still, like it’s holding its breath. The darkness pulses in the corner of his eyes. His own heart beats out of rhythm inside his ribs. And the darkness inside him spill outside.

“I enjoyed killing Hobbs.”

Will’s lips curve into a proud smile, and his sharp eyes glitter with adoration.

Hannibal fears and hopes that Will is about to kiss him.

“I know, darlin’,” Will says instead, adoring and proud and pleased as he pries Hannibal's hands open and deposits his own drink on Hannibal's hand. "I know," he repeats sweetly. He lifts his eyes, locking his gaze with Hannibal, and taps the bottom of Hannibal’s drink. “Cheers to that.”

Somehow freed, Hannibal drinks it all.

[x]

"You haven't answered my question," Will comments idly as they walk out together off Alana's office. "The hour is over."

Hannibal is warm all over. With the whiskey he drank, and Will's pride. They walk together towards their cars slowly. Their arms brush together from time to time, and Hannibal wishes Will would just grab his arm again as he did when they encountered Freddie Lounds.

"Do you really need me to answer?" Hannibal asks, hoping that Will feels inclined to be kind. Hoping, also, that Will feels inclined to he cruel. Hannibal doesn't know which one will bring which answer.

"Not really," Will shrugs. "But I really want to hear you say it."

It's snowing lightly, not enough to tempt Hannibal into offering Will to wait the storm at his house. Not enough for Will to just invite himself.

Hannibal shakes his head with a deep, defeated sigh. A capitulation.

"You're the protagonist of my every fantasy," he confesses, sparing the details that he knows Will is plenty aware of.

Will beams at that, unable to hide his smile. He –cruelly or kindly, Hannibal can't really be sure– takes Hannibal's hand in his, and doesn't say anything else.

They reach Hannibal's car first because Hannibal is always the first to leave. The first to *flee*. He is the only one who ever leaves when they're together. If it were for Will, he would have already moved in, dogs and all, into Hannibal's house.

"I'm going fishing this weekend," Will comments as they arrive at Hannibal's car, demanding another moment of attention, and just plainly demanding: "Come have dinner with me."

"I'm vegetarian, Will," Hannibal reminds him, though he knows is a weak answer, and it won't stop Will.

"You don't eat red meat," Will insists, as he is his routine every Thursday. "Fish is white, and doesn't have the same texture or taste."

Hannibal forces a smile, and a sigh that he at least tries to make sound irritated. Of course, it doesn't fool Will, but at least Hannibal tried. "The answer, again, is no, *doctor."*

Will accepts defeat with a shrug, but he is not deterred. He stays firmly planted outside Hannibal's car as the profiler steps inside.

“One day, I’m going to marry you darlin’, you’ll see.”

“I can’t wait,” Hannibal jokes, pausing his movements to not let Will see how his hands are shaking, aware that he won’t get the key easily into the ignition until he calms himself.

“I can,” Will answers without missing a beat. “I can, and I’ll wait for you Hannibal, as long as you need me to.”

Chapter End Notes

I told you that I would probably give a double upload this week, but that was before because this chapter was very short. Instead I added another scene and worked actually decently. BUT I promise without fail that chapter 10 & 11 are going to be posted together with only a day between them because.... well, little spoiler: THEY FUC–

Little Lamb

Chapter Notes

> Psst, I know this chapter is short in comparison with the previous ones, so the next chapter is on Thursday! Take this as a little treat to get you ready for the next one.

In Jack's office, Alana, Hannibal, Will, and Jack himself, sit in various degrees of comfortability.

"Taking Abigail out of a controlled environment would be reckless," Alana protests. She sits at Hannibal's left, being the most tense of the four of them. She purses her lips, but her gentle personality lacks the bite she needs to persuade Jack Crawford away from what he wants, even when she is actually right. "You take her home, she may experience intense emotions, respond aggressively. Or reenact some aspect of the traumatic event without even realizing it."

"Alana has a point," Hannibal confirms from the second chair in front of Jack's desk. He is not exactly tense, but is similar to the tension Jack carries. A certain nervousness about what can come out of this.

Jack nods and turns his eyes to the right wall, where Will, as usual, is the most comfortable, leaning his back onto it. Jack opens his mouth and closes it along with his eyes, releasing a deep sigh before finally speaking.

"Doctor Graham, your opinion?" He asks with all the peace he can muster, trying to not tense further than Hannibal.

Will makes a show of thinking about it, rolling his head against the wall. "Doctor Bloom is right," he says without bothering to move away from the wall. "But there is a scenario where revisiting the trauma event could help Abigail heal and actually prevent denial."

Jack looks as surprised as Alana is with Will's agreement, but where he looks pleased with it, Alana looks betrayed. "We have a difference of opinion," Jack says unapologetically, "Therefore I’m choosing the opinion that best serves my agenda. Abigail Hobbs wants to go home. Let’s take Abigail Hobbs home."

[x]

By Will's design, their party of four ended up at the Hobbs' residence.

It had been an amusing evening of watching them wash away the word ***CANNIBAL*** from the garage door for the best part of the day. Will wondered if it gave Hannibal some sense of relief to wash it away, or if he even cared.

Abigail, Alana, and Hannibal had spent the best part of the day scrubbing the front of the house. Will helpfully carried a bucket with soapy water, and that was the full extent of his effort.

It was a good evening, nice even. It *was* until Abigail decided to pull a stunt. *Oh,* she thought she was so fucking *clever.* She thought she could have the upper hand. Thought she could manipulate *Will.*

Poor, stupid child.

"You'll be my mom, and you'll be my dad," she told Alana and Hannibal, then turned to Will, wide blue eyes settled on his, *challenging.* "And you'll be the man on the phone."

Will could recognize that *sure,* it was a decent attempt. A good stunt if he were inclined to favor her. She was a clever girl, and brave. The thing is, she was *so stupid* if she thought she could get the upper hand with *Will.*

She was so proud of her little stunt. Will only needed a chance, a small one, to get her alone and teach her a lesson.

The opportunity, luckily, arose soon after lunch, courtesy of Hannibal and his picnic basket.

Hannibal, God bless his Savior Complex, was so proud of Abigail's relieved smile when she saw it there were all vegetarian options. Alana was so proud too. Will was indifferent.

Alana is in another room currently, in Abigail's room specifically, packing her clothes. Abigail's room is on the other side of the house. If Abigail screams loud enough she has the chance to make Alana hear it, but Alana won't be in time to save her if she does.

Hannibal has just left the kitchen, carrying the empty picnic basket and cooler back to his car, leaving Abigail trapped in the kitchen with Will.

Poor, stupid, unlucky child.

Abigail flinches the moment she realizes Will is holding a soaked knife in his hand, and the only weapon she has in hers is a damp dishcloth.

"I – I think I'm going… I think Hannibal just called, I'm going to–" she mutters, attempting to clumsily reach for the door, terrified of being alone with Will.

Poor little lamb left to the slaughter.

Will pushes the door closed behind her with a wet hand before she can flee and uses his weight to keep it closed and Abigail ends up trapped with him.

"Get out to see if it's raining?" Will asks nonchalantly, clicking his tongue. "I don't think so."

Abigail doesn't dare to look at him in the eyes. She averts her gaze, pinning in on the extended arm blocking her escape route. She doesn't move and barely blinks. A self-preservation skill she learned. If she doesn't move, the predator will forget about her.

She is absolutely terrified, probably realizing that she shouldn't have poked at Will. She must think that if Will doesn't see her as enough of a threat then he won't kill her.

Will is not her dad. Prior to this, he had no intention to kill her, but he has no love for her or any interest that could stop him from doing it if she decides to step on his fucking toes.

"That was really stupid of you, Abigail," he says without having to explain himself further. He saw her stupid bravery at that moment just as he saw the way her fragile fingers trembled, how she quickly adverted her eyes towards Hannibal as if the man could protect her.

Will makes her turn to face him with an eerily gentle hand, watching her flinch when he touches her but not moving away from the contact. The learned behavior of a beaten-up pet. He uses his free hand to tip her head up and grips her chin like he does when his dogs eat something they shouldn't and he has to pry their mouths open.

Similarly, he has to make Abigail look at him. Her eyes flicker when he clicks his tongue but they don't properly reach his. She doesn't want to look at him, but she has no other option. If life has taught her something, is to obey the predator in the room.

Blue doe eyes meet Will's a moment after, carefully and slowly.

Good girl.

"You'll see, Abigail, if you want to go and tell the police who you think I am, or what you *think* I did. Be my guest, go on, I won't stop you." He speaks to her like one would speak to a child; carefully and slowly, somehow fondly but not entirely. He doesn't sound fond of her because he is not. He sounds like he is making fun of her, and *that* he does. "But you just remember that not only you don't have any proof of it, but is *my word* against yours, daughter of the Minnesota Shrike."

Her throat swallows around a painful lump, and Will can imagine how the repressed tears are pounding at the fresh wound of her throat. Good. Pain is the best teacher.

"Jack Crawford is out there, Abigail, and he is relentless. He is going to turn this case into a witch-hunt. He knows you ate those girls, that you helped your daddy kill them. He doesn't believe that you were the helpless little girl you paint yourself to be."

Will leans towards her, he is not a tall man or imposing like Hannibal, but when he puts his other hand at the side of her head, resting them both on the door and crouching to her eye level, he knows how terrifying he can be.

Tears drag down Abigail's face, but she doesn't blink, doesn't make an expression of fear. She is brave. It doesn't matter. Will can feel the fear trapped inside her ribs, hear her terrified rabbit heart running inside her fragile chest.

“He hasn’t found any proof of your involvement yet,” Will tells her, as a little warning, a reminder that she is safe for now. He lowers his voice, lowers his stance, and hisses. “But if you dare to pull another stunt like that, believe me, if there’s evidence, *I will find it,* and if there’s no evidence of your involvement, darling’, trust me, *I’ll put it there.”*

She snaps her eyes closed, trying not to break. Her lips are a white line pressed on a red face. Will stands, taking a step back and Abigail opens her eyes tentatively, wrongfully thinking that Will’s assault is finished.

“Your father is dead,” Will tells her plainly, and her bloodshot eyes flicker to his with anger. She sobs, tears flowing down her rosy cheeks. The image is pitiful, but Will hasn’t been able to feel pity in many years. “Your mother is dead, and now you *are* a helpless little child, but – if you promise, *really promise,* to behave like a good girl, I can protect you.”

She manages to sneer at him through her tears, mustering a great deal of resentment for a young, crying little girl. She has enough fire in her to survive. Will can consider being her dad if she behaves.

The door opens from the other side and Will quickly schools his expression into something softer to match Abigail’s state. Hannibal enters carefully and takes notice of Abigail’s tears first.

Her eyes snap to Hannibal and Will hears the song of that bothersome bird called Hope. He grabs it quickly by the neck before it has time to take a fly and crushes its neck with his hands.

“Abigail,” Will calls, holding her reassuringly by the shoulders, gentling his voice for Hannibal’s sake. “You’re going to be safe. Hannibal and I can, and will, protect you.”

She wants to protest and glare at him. Wants to run to Hannibal and beg for his help, but she has no chance. Will has already hooked him, and the only thing he has to do is reel him in. He turns to Hannibal and extends a hand towards the profiler, begging with his eyes. “Isn’t that true, darlin’?”

Hannibal gives him a fond smile, trying to be irritated by the slip of an endearment in this situation, but failing miserably at being mad at Will. Hope bats its wings in the older man’s chest, and Will won’t crush that one. He will feed it, take care of it, and keep it in a cage of bones.

Hannibal doesn’t hesitate to take his hand, so starved to heal that oozing wound in his heart and fill the lonely space there.

Will looks at Abigail then, satisfaction in his eyes and a smug smile as he goes to hug her. He can feel her tensing, trying to resist like a reluctant dog. But she is trapped and ends up fitting herself into Will’s arms.

Will drops his head on top of hers, runs his fingers through her hair, and looks at Hannibal – *See what I can give you? My body, your soul, our child* – and reels him in by the hand, so Hannibal can join in their makeshift family hug.

[x]

There are certain dogs that are easier to tame than others. Abigail so far seems to be the reluctant type of dog, the one that likes to grunt and growl but doesn't usually attempt to bite.

Still, just to be sure, Will takes measures to be certain that the idea of biting back won't get inside her head.

Will is not her father. But he can be like Hobbs, for better or for worse, with all that it implies.

Scalating

Chapter Notes

> Yes, I know I said I would upload on Thursday but I couldn't wait, I'm dropping it a day before, sue me. (please don't actually sue me)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's phone (the brand new one he bought after smashing the other one) begins to ring at 8:26 a.m. in a Saturday.

It has been almost nine hours since he killed Marissa Schurr.

He is too comfortable in bed, so he lets it ring. He has barely slept during the night and he has just arrived home three hours ago. He has hoped the FBI would take longer to find her, but it seems Abigail had to sing.

The ringing stops, and Will is surprised when he counts to five and the rining doesn't start again.

Jack Crawford usually doesn't stop calling until he gets an answer, be it affirmative or smashed.

Will raises from the bed at the same time his phone pings with a message notification. Not Jack then.

He picks it up and finds Hannibal's name flashing back at him.

'Could you call me back when you see this?'

Will smiles at the message, the exhaustion of a night of driving and killing disappearing almost immediately, replaced with the butterflies that come with excitement and love.

Will is a serial killer, not a psychopath. He is not inmune to fondness or love or sentimentalist cliches. He is an empath, even if he does his best to weaponize his empathy instead of letting it consume him. He may be cruel and he may experience love in a far more twisted version than the average person, but that doesn't negate that he can feel it, just like Hannibal is a psychopath and not a serial killer, and he is still able to love.

Will also may be harvoring an obsession with a certain FBI profiler. But, since Hannibal *is* a psychopath, there's not much difference between twisted love, and obsession.

Actually, it makes them even *more* perfectly suited to each other. The martyr psychopath and the serial killer empath. A romance for the ages.

Will has *seen*. Will has spent these last months assessing the wound that Hannibal's beast wears. He can see it in his mind-eye; spots without fur that revealed ink dark skin, a broken antler, prominent ribs and limbs eaten by the freezing cold.

Will shushes the beast's whines with cooing sounds and gentle voice; he promises it a warm meal and a warmer bed if Hannibal were to follow him home.

There are certain dogs that are easier to tame than others. There are reluctant dogs like Abigail, and craving ones like Hannibal. Hannibal is the type of dog that walks with his tail between the back legs, head bowed down and big eyes hoping for someone to pet him.

He is the most dangerous type of dog. The one that grew up in the wild, the one that survived and nursed at his wounds on his own. Abigail arrived already taught how to fear. Hannibal has learned to bite.

But back on the phone thing: Hannibal has called Will, so Will calls him back.

"Hi, darlin'," Will says as Hannibal picks up the phone. "Sorry, I was asleep. Did something happen or you just wanted to hear my voice?"

A chuckle reverberates from the other side of the line and it's quickly abated. So, Hannibal is at Quantico, probably, or at least with the team. Perhaps only Jack.

"I always want to hear your voice first thing in the morning," Hannibal whispers carefully, and Will can hear the smile in the man's voice, making him smile in return. He can also hear the telling sounds of FBI agents in the background. "Sadly, something did happen. A new body dropped in a similar Copy-Cat fashion, we are flying to Minesotta in an hour."

Something irks Will in the wrong way. He double checks quickly if he has missed calls from Jack, but there are none.

"Did Jack asked you to butter me up?" Will teases, though he is a little bit suspicious. It isn't likely that this could be a trap, but is better to be sure. He loves Hannibal, but he also loves his freedom.

Another chuckle echoes, and Hannibal whispers even lower.

"Actually, I asked Jack not to call you."

So not a trap then, just Hannibal manipulating his way into Will's phone.

"And for that I'm incredibly thankful," Will jokes. He makes a pause and lowers his own voice, even if he is alone in his bedroom. "Is it really The Copy-Cat?"

"We don't know for sure yet…"

"And Jack could use my input?" Will scoffs.

"Your input is always appreciated," Hannibal agrees, and pauses. There's sounds of steps, then a door closing, and then silence. "I would be grateful for your presence, too."

Will covers his mouth with a hand, trying to tame his smile. “In which capacity would you like my presence? Coworker? Shrink? Friend?” He leaves a stretch of silence at the end of the sentence, the intonation for something to come. The lure dangling in the water.

“It’s indistinct, I always treasure your presence no matter the capacity… I know you may not want to come to a crime scene of The Copy-Cat but…”

“Oh, shut up,” Will scoffs, rolling in the bed with a laugh. “I’ll be there. Give me a minute. I’ll shower and finish waking up.”

“Thank you,” comes Hannibal’s soft answer. It’s a shy thing and Will hums, still in bed, soaking in the warmth of his sheets and the softness of the mattress as he has Hannibal’s voice in his ear.

“Mmm, I don’t know if *thanks* will do,” Will teases. He can picture the curl of Hannibal’s lip, the tilt of his head. He can hear the exasperated but fond sigh.

“How can I repay your kindness, Will?”

Unrepentant and without hesitation, Will states, again: “Have dinner with me. Tonight.”

There are certain things that an experienced fisherman learns: first, to craft a good lure, learn the fish’s taste and adapt to them for a successful bite. Then, for that to succeed, one must tire the fish. Is not about just plucking it out of the water. It’s a constant pull against the current and the fish as it tries to flee away. One must be patient, allow the fish to get tired, pull when the fish has no energy to fight any longer.

“You are a relentless man, Dr. Graham,” Hannibal teases with a defeated but flirtatious sigh, and Will know he has won.

“I think of me more as a man who knows what he wants.”

“Are you implying that I am not?”

“On the contrary, Hannibal. I think you are very aware of what you want,” Will stands from the bed quickly without waiting for an response. “See you later, darlin’.”

[x]

Will ends up entering Hobbs’ murder cabin, Jack doesn’t even have to insist much. Although Will *does* make himself look reluctant when he does it. Just to keep appearances. He is sure that he has been careful. The Copy-Cat has never before left a trace of evidence behind, but it doesn’t hurt to be seen entering, just in case.

Will spends a decent amount of time on the crime scene, though he is more focused on cataloguing Hannibal’s reactions. This one is more personal. Will used some of Hobbs’

mindset, but he is not hiding that this is his work. He has never totally hidden his work, but this has a little more *personality.*

With other people Will has to close his eyes and step away to resist the miriad of emotions and thoughts spilling from them. Hannibal is different. He is calm. Will struggles to get a clear sense of what's going on inside his head half the time. Will wants to ask him *'what do you see? Do you see me?'* with a fervor that makes him worry about his own sanity.

His hands are shaking with the way he wants to reach for Hannibal and pry his skull open to get a look at the tender flesh underneath, to watch his brain at work. Something that works in his favor actually, giving him a believable and an easy escape route from the scene before he can do or say anything stupid. Hannibal catches on it with expertise and half-rehearsed half-truthful kind eyes, tipping his head towards the door where Will scurries away.

Will has always been aware of his own God-Complex, so similar yet so different from Hannibal's. He has always been aware of serial killers common profiles and how different he was from them. He never cared about being seen or the attention or to be remembered. Always he has been content with playing with his prey.

But with Hannibal is different. Will craves his attention like no other. His self preservation instinct fully evaporates and he wants Hannibal to find him, discover him and *see him* , fully, all of him. From the good to the bad to The Copy-Cat.

Will sits outside, and in the distance he gets to catch a flash of red hair and the click of a camera. He manages a curt nod in Lounds direction before she disappears, glad that she got his message. He poses for the camera, trying to look worse than he actually feels. It works, and a moment later his phone pings with a message from Lounds: *'you look like shit man, don't worry, ill make you prettier w photoshop.'*

'you try to look at a cc crime scene while jack yells at you and then tell me how you look.'

Her answer comes a moment later, with a few seconds of delay than usual. Erased and written again.

'CCat confirmed?'

Will pockets his phone without answering knowing that Lounds can pick up the answer from the silence.

The clicks of the camera feel louder, and yet still they cannot drown the loud yell that erupts from inside the cabin.

It's Jack's voice to no one's surprise – and that somehow it didn't shatter the windows, but Hannibal comes out a moment later, looking like he also wants to shout angrily at the top of his lungs, or like he would prefer to work in a Mcdonalds than under Jack's orders for another second. A testament to that is the way Hannibal takes a single look at Will sitting on the damp grass and against the wall and, without hesitation, he drops on the ground to sit alongside Will.

The frown on Hannibal's face softens the moment Will wiggles to his side and their bodies are pressed toegether. Will uses his free hand to pull Hannibal towards him, while uses the other to search through his phone and prepare his voice recorder. Something tells him he will want to keep track of this when Jack comes out.

Hannibal hides his face on Will's shoulder with a tired sigh and inhaling deeply after that. Will can almost hear him purr when he uses his hand on Hannibal's shoulder to comb his fingers through older man's hair.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Will asks tentatively, softly scratching Hannibal's scalp with his nails. His tone is teasing, but the offer is genuine, and Will can feel the soft exhale against his neck taking the shape similar to a chuckle.

"Jack believes is Nicholas Boyle."

Will frowns. "The boy that was shouting at Abigail the other day?"

Hannibal nods against his shoulder and Will cannot think of a single reason for what he could have done wrong with this tableau for Jack to think Boyle had anything to do with this.

Will met the man the other day –fair enough, for less than fifteen minutes– but he is not a killer. It's quite offensive.

"Jack told me they found Abigail having a panic attack around 5 a.m. She confessed she received pictures of the body," Hannibal mutters. "The pictures came from a burner phone. She told Jack that she thinks it was Boyle."

Huh.

So Abigail has *actually* learned her lesson. Good, good girl. Will can work with this. She made a great excuse to cover for herself and for Will. She can be a good daughter for him and Hannibal.

"Do *you* think it was him?" Will asks, somehow hesitant.

"No." Hannibal retreats from his shoulder, but he stays close to him, his body still pressed to Will's, but with enough space that Will can see the equally offended frown on his face. "Jack is right this doesn't fit The Copy-Cat's usual behavior but… It cannot be anyone else. You saw the scene."

"I did," Will answers, but Hannibal worries his bottom lip between his sharp teeth, ignoring Will's response.

Will doens't take offense on being ignored. After all, he is in Hannibal's mind, even if with other name.

"The Copy-Cat has never copied caught serial killers, only the ones that are active. Not because he is interested in them, or because he wants to muddy the waters. He doesn't care about the other serial killers. It's because he wants to play, show that he is better, that his

crime scenes are *better*. And that he is better than the FBI." Hannibal pauses. “He is very petty.”

“Petty?” The word escapes from Will, scandalized, though he is lucky Hannibal takes it as a joke and only nods.

“ *‘Look at me, I’m better than those amateurs.’* He knows we won’t think his crime scenes are from the killer he is trying to imitate. He is not even trying to *imitate* them. He is borrowing them. He is very clever. Serial killers get caught because they evolve and they show too much of themselves. The only thing that The Copy-Cat shows us is how he is better than everybody else, better than us in identifying criminals." Hannibal sighs, hitting softly the back of his head against the wall. Will almost feel bad about not having this recorded, and his finger hovers around the *record* button of his phone. But then Hannibal adds: “The other serial killers are children painting with their fingers… he is… he is Boticelli.”

Will stops. He wishes he could have this recorded so he can always hear Hannibal’s dreamy sigh again and again and again.

“Do you think he is an artist? Or do you think he fancies himself an artist?”

Hannibal shakes his head. Softer, he says, “I think, if there was someone that could make something beautiful out of death, it’s him.” He turns to Will then, shaken from his train of thought and realizing what he just has said. “I apologize Will, you just came from the crime scene too, I shouldn’t have…”

Will sees a flash of fear appear in the maroon eyes. Scared that he has said too much, showed too much of the wolf under the wool of the sheep.

“Hush,” Will silences him, cupping Hannibal’s cheek with his free hand and brushing away those fears. His heart is kicking inside his chest, and his eyes drop to Hannibal’s lips. “I adore you,” Will confesses, delighted when he sees a smile grazing Hannibal’s lips and a blush crawling up to his cheeks.

Will thinks, stupidly, that Hannibal is going to finally stop suppressing himself and kiss him. But Hannibal takes his hand instead, and does something worse to the already precarious state of Will’s heart, and kisses his fingers.

Will releases a shaky sigh, unable to tear his eyes away from the point where Hannibal’s lips are in contact with his skin.

“I know why Jack doesn’t want to believe this is The Copy-Cat,” Hannibal resumes, as if Will could be of any use right now for anything other than to kiss Hannibal until they both see stars. Hannibal whispers the words against Will’s knuckles, his thumb stroking Will’s palm lightly as he speaks. Will barely manages a sound of acknowledgment. “If this is The Copy-Cat, then he has changed his MO. There has never been a motive with him. He is uncatchable, but if we catch the killers in time, then he stops his sounders. But if he is evolving…”

“He could kill whenever he wants, in the way he wants, active serial killer to copy or not,” Will finishes for him, and Hannibal rewards him with another kiss to his knuckles.

“Exactly.”

Hannibal’s eyes glisten for a moment, looking into Will’s. The moment is perfect. They could just tip their heads to either side and move an inch, just enough to learn the taste of the other. But Hannibal, God bless him, is dedicated in his attempt to hide from Will and lowers his gaze, focusing it on Will’s hand.

“I always thought of him like a part of the team, making us work harder, and his crime scenes have always helped me to find clues, marking me the other serial killers’ mistakes like a stern professor circling their wrong answers with a glaring red pen. I owe him my gratitude, and for that he has also my respect.”

Will doesn’t know how much long he can take this, Hannibal’s adoration wrongfully directed, so close and yet so unreachable. He wants to free Hannibal from the chains and shackles he has so voluntarily subjected himself to. He wants to kiss Hannibal, kneel at his feet and confess who he is and how much he aches for Hannibal to look his way.

But of course, that’s exactly the moment Jack decides to step from the cabin. Thank God almighty if He is there somewhere in the universe, saving Will before he does something stupid.

Jack is wearing his worst frown to the date, and Will press play on his voice recorder as he greets him with a nod.

“Have you thought about it?” Jack asks, fists inside the pockets of his thick coat. He barely spares a glance to Will as he speaks to Hannibal, all his body language directed towards the profiler.

“It’s not Nicholas Boyle, Jack,” Hannibal tells him without standing from the ground, body still pressed against Will. “I know you don’t want to believe The Copy-Cat is evolving, but just look at it.”

“It could *not* be Nicholas Boyle, and it could *not* be The Copy-Cat, and it could be a new Shrike. We need to cover all bases,” Jack agrees without agreeing, somehow still in denial. Will makes a note of signing the next tableau he makes. *To Jack Crawford, with love, The Copy-Cat.* “Dr. Graham, I’m glad you’re here,” Jack says instead, redirecting his attention to Will now that Hannibal has proven himself useless.

“I’m sure you are,” Will deadpans with as much glee in his voice as he has just discovered that Buster has somehow opened the trash can, eaten everything inside and puked all over the bed like the troublemaker terrier did two weeks ago.

Jack doesn’t smile. Niceties won’t work with Will. They never do, and he is plenty aware of it.

“We could use your insight,” he says instead, straight to the point.

“You have a profiler Jack, and I’m not him.”

“You still saw the crime scene. And I’m sure you talked with Hannibal just now,” Jack counters, spreading his gloved hands in front of him. “I’m sure you have a personal opinion, and I would like to hear it.”

“My opinion, Jack, is that you have a very intelligent profiler and a capable forensic team, and you should listen to them instead of trying to shake the answer you want from me,” Will counters with his usual venom. “Actually, I shouldn’t be consulted about an active crime scene, I’m not a profiler, I don’t work for you, I’m a civilian.”

Jack upper lip twitches, mimicking the way his brow does. He keeps his voice mild, but Will knows he wants to yell at him.

“Then I will ask you to leave the crime scene, if you’re a civilian," Jack says it in the most polite way he can, aware that he can’t just yell at Will without repercussions, but he spits the words like he does when he doesn’t get what he wants.

“I’m here as Hannibal’s emergency contact Jack,” Will says with a smug grin. “So, no, you can’t kick me out, and you can’t make me work. Deal with it.”

Jack swallows a shout, and takes a good look at them. He can’t yell and can’t shake him and can’t kick him out, so he tries another approach, tipping his chin at them sitting together on the ground.

“How long has this been going on?” He asks off-handely. Under that, there is a threat.

Hannibal shifts at Will’s side, ready to stand up and fight with Jack, his Savior Complex kicking in. And though Will finds endearing how much Hannibal wants to be his knight in shining armor and white horse, Will beats him to it.

Will stands up, putting a hand on Hannibal’s shoulder to steady the profiler down and to haul himself up. When Will is up on his feet, he keeps his hand on Hannibal’s shoulder, close enough to the older man’s neck that he can stroke the column of his throat with the pad of his thumb.

Good boy, heel.

“Are you implying that I broke a code of ethics, Jack?” Will asks, raising a brow. “Because to do that, I should have been Hannibal's doctor, and I’ve never been Hannibal’s psychiatrist in any capacity. If we want to be friendly, or anything else, we can. Unless you want to confess in front of a jury that you paid me to rubber stamp your profiler and break Patient-Doctor confidentiality and report to you. I’m *sure* the jury will love to hear also how you put *me,* a civilian, in the field. And I was never very good at calculating distances but I’m not sure there are 600 feet between you and me like the court ordered.”

Jack flinches, caught between the metaphorical wall and Will’s sword-sharp tongue and sharper eyes.

Will takes a step forward, releasing Hannibal's shoulder to stand in front of the man, tilting his chin up to look at Jack into the eyes without the barrier of his glasses, face carefully stern and bored.

"Serial killers evolve Jack, The Copy-Cat has been playing cat and mouse with you for a very long time. It was a matter of time until he decided that it was not enough. If you want my opinion in the matter, is that you should listen to your profiler, and to expect another body to drop."

Jack doesn't answer. His lips twitch in the way Will knows it's Jack trying to not start barking around. His fists shake in the way Will knows is Jack forcing them steady and not grab Will by the collar of his shirt.

Will pats him on the shoulder, once. Not in any way comforting or caring but dismissing.

"And don't stick your nose in the private life of your employees. If you want to see me again you have my lawyer's number. We can always see each other at court."

Jack stays there in silence the time it takes Will to turn around and take a step towards Hannibal, then he is gone without another word, finally defeated.

"Sorry," Will says with a shrug, offering Hannibal a hand to stand up. "I know you wanted me to be your damsel in distress, but you know how much I enjoy being a pain in the ass."

"I know," Hannibal agrees with an amused curl of his lips. He takes a step closer to Will than he expected, and again, Will is under the impression that Hannibal is going to kiss him. Hopes so, but he also knows it's not the time yet. Hannibal still takes Will's hands in his for a second time, and brings them to his lips, caressing them with his warm breath before placing a careful kiss in each knuckle. "I need to go with Jack, you're right, a body will be dropping soon if this is The Copy-Cat."

Will is breathless, trying to make sense of Hannibal's words over the loud beat of his heart.

Hannibal chuckles softly at his silence, and his breath tickles at Will's hands. He squeezes them softly before releasing Will.

"I take that I'll see you tonight, then?" Will asks, the wings of hope fluttering inside his chest.

Hannibal seems to hesitate for a second as he drops his eyes, but then he mutters, "I think so, yes."

[x]

Will allows himself to be walking on clouds until he reaches his car. Then, he allows himself a little more time to be giggling and giddy like a schoolgirl with a crush during the ride back to his house.

When he arrives, he checks his chat with Lounds. Just after the recording he sent with Jack Crawford, she'd sent:

'I could kiss you.'

Will shakes his head, tipping back *'you're not my type'* and he has barely stepped out from his car and into his house when his phone pings again, and again, and again, with 15 multiple pictures of him and Hannibal outside the Hobbs' cabin attached and Lounds writing:

'I know ;)'

Will can't control it. He laughs.

He wants to do something stupid, cratf something for Hannibal. Drop a body worthy of being called art.

He decides that he better starts making dinner.

Chapter End Notes

In case is not clear YES, THE NEXT CHAPTER IS SMUT. THEY WILL FINALLY FUCK GOD BLESS.

Clawing a way out

Chapter Notes

> Oof, this took a while. Sorry for the week hiatus, but porn is my weakest skill. As promised, I am bringing a double update, this chapter today, and tomorrow another one with smut. Also, this chapter is more than 10k, so, hope a week of delay is worth it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal arrives shortly before 7 while Will has barely begun preparing dinner.

“I hope you don’t take it as an offense,” Hannibal says, gesturing to a bottle of wine he carries in his hand. He has dressed up nicely, leaving behind the soft colors and soft clothes he uses to work, and opting for a bespoke new suit. It’s not a three-piece, but the quality looks improved.

Will catches how the profiler keeps attempting to put a hand on his stomach as to straighten a waistcoat that is not there. Will makes a note to take him on a date to somewhere nice, perhaps a good restaurant where Hannibal can go all in, and dress up as flashy as he wants.

“None taken,” Will answers, guiding Hannibal inside. “I’m sure your taste in wine is way better than mine. I’m more of a whiskey guy.”

In another life, Will may had his bed in the living room, but in this one, he has a socially acceptable living room. The wall is covered by trinkets and books around the fireplace. The dogs’ beds are scattered around the floor around the sofa and the armchairs. There is a desk against the window that Will sometimes uses, and a motor boat on the corner that he has been busying himself with before Jack Crawford came knocking and now lays ignored for the time being. Being a serial killer and dating takes so much time, even for someone with as much free time as Will.

Will’s room it’s on the upper floor of the house, just like his study. Hannibal shouldn’t step on the study yet, it’s too dangerous, but he is definitely welcome in Will’s bedroom.

The shed is another space of Will’s home that Hannibal shouldn’t enter yet, but Will can’t wait for the moment he can show it to Hannibal. Hopefully by Hannibal’s own volition, and not because he has to drag his lifeless body to it.

“I’m surprised that you came early though,” Will comments as he rolls his sleeves to his elbows, not missing the way Hannibal’s eyes follow the movement. “I thought Jack was going to have you trapped a little bit longer. Kinda feared I was going to end up eating alone.”

Will resumes his post at the kitchen counter, busying himself with dinner. The fish is one of his most recent catches, and when Will usually would bleed them out in the water, he kept this one frozen, hoping to catch Hannibal's reaction to the first cut.

"He tried," Hannibal says, catching his breath. His eyes follow Will's hands and the way blood spills from inside the fish, coloring them a bright red. He turns sickly green with the first cut and his voice comes out less shaken than Will expected, but surely more than Hannibal is comfortable with. "But even if I don't usually say no to a date with The Copy-Cat, I think I prefer one with you."

The word *date* clings to Will's mind. He is on a date with Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal, who has been forcing obliviousness to his advances for the best part of their acquaintance, but now can in no way deny where their relationship is headed. Hannibal, whom finally addresses Will's feelings and accepts them as intentions. Hannibal, who knows where this is headed, and that is walking towards Will, finally.

"I hope you don't take this as an offense," Will ventures, watching the way Hannibal is trying to keep his composure, trying to hold his breath at the sharp iron smell of blood. "You look sick, darlin'. Have you been eating well lately?" He asks almost drawn, an innocent and worried question though both of them know is anything but.

Hannibal levels him a glare that brings some of the profiler's usual strength back to him. "I've forgiven you a great deal of rudeness, Will, don't abuse my fondness of you trying to psychoanalyze me." It is said without hostility, if only a bit petty. Well, maybe a little bit of hostility, but just the baseline hostility that Will wakes up on everyone that interacts with him. Hannibal still manages a small smile over the anxious churn of his stomach.

Hannibal has seen through him easily, just as Will expected. Will doesn't usually like being looked at, but more and more often he wants to draw Hannibal's eyes away from everyone else and be the sole focus of him. Having that dark gaze on him is thrilling. In a life so boring, Hannibal is the most exciting thing Will has ever experienced.

Like being the only one knowing how to play chess in the world, and suddenly finding a person waiting for a rival with a chessboard in front of him.

"But you like me," Will flirts back. Hannibal watches him with a tired fondness, admiring his energy while detesting his rudeness. None of that is difficult to read, clear like a day, just like his desire.

"Sometimes I wonder why," he jabs.

"It's clearly my looks, damn sure is not my charming personality," Will jokes, returning to his work of scaling the fish.

"You seem sure of that."

"Is not my good looks then?" Will quirks his head to look at him, and though Hannibal still looks fairly sick, the fondness overtakes his features. It's real fondness, not the fake thing he has rehearsed to fit in society. Will cherishes it.

“They play an important role, I’m not going to deny that, but they’re not the only reason why I’m fond of you.”

Will washes his hands, letting silence set between them. He leaves the fish for a moment, knowing that the dogs are well-trained and won’t steal it from the board while he is distracted. He goes to Hannibal, infusing as much of the real worry he has. It is not much, but he actually loves Hannibal and doesn’t want the profiler to pass out or vomit on their first date. If Will has to delay his plans for the sake of Hannibal's comfort he will do it without hesitation. Hannibal's becoming can wait a little longer. It's preferable, but a concession Will is willing to make.

“You sure you’re okay though? You look ill,” Will asks kindly, extending his empathy towards the older man, reading the tremors of his hands and the way his eyes avoid the cutting board.

“I am, is just that I’m not used to eat…” Hannibal struggles to finish the sentence, his anxious eyes flickering back to the cutting board before returning to Will. He makes a sound with his throat when he swallows around the next word, “Meat.”

“I know,” Will coos, raising a hand to cup the profiler’s cheek with as much apology as he can muster. “I know, I thought it would be good for you to start with fish, but we can have something different to eat if you want.”

The fight leaves Hannibal then, and he sags slightly towards Will, nuzzling his face towards the doctor’s cold palm. “I’m not anemic, Will if that was your worry. My diet is good.”

Will does love Hannibal. He could be kind and insist on eating something different. But it’s because of that love that he pushes the truth out of his mouth.

“I didn’t mean good for your physical health, Hannibal,” Will says, voice dark and low, hanging the rest of the sentence for Hannibal to find.

Hannibal turns paler, and Will sees with stark clarity the moment he suppresses a shiver, how he forces to keep his soulless eyes on Will. “Is this your professional opinion?” He asks devoid of judgment, but blankly, with no inflection or real emotion in his voice.

Again, suppressing. Again, wanting Will to push him over the lines he won't *(can’t)* cross by himself.

Will loves him, of course he would do anything that Hannibal asks. Will loves Hannibal, of course he is going to want what is best for him.

“You told me you enjoyed killing Hobbs,” Will states lovingly, combing the fingers of his free hand through Hannibal’s hair, flickering his eyes to Hannibal’s lips and keeping them there for a second too long, just to make a point, before he meets Hannibal’s eyes. “Have you never thought how it would feel to hurt the men who killed Mischa?”

Hannibal is eerily still, every single muscle and articulation locked in place. He feels made of marble under Will’s hand, his eyes not properly cruel but severe. There’s a sound somewhere,

too quiet, like hooves. Hannibal doesn't move and yet still he seems to grow monumental in this moment. The light falls over him in a certain way that sharpens his already-cutting features.

"I wasn't aware we were on a session," Hannibal comments, his voice a low rumble that would send shivers to a lesser human being, but that sounds like the call of a mate for Will.

"We aren't," Will answers with a dreamy sigh, unable to keep his voice steady. His eyes are fixated on Hannibal's, enthralled by the way the maroon seems to gleam with speckles of red, like spilled blood catching on moonlight.

Will normally avoids other people's eyes like they're the plague, but he is spellbound by Hannibal's. He can't look away, and seemingly so does Hannibal.

"Perhaps in a session, then," Hannibal says, holding Will's wrist with careful fingers and a steel-like grip, pushing it away from him.

"Very well," Will licks his lips as he obeys, letting Hannibal manhandle him away.

It's just a matter of time then.

[x]

Dinner is a humble affair, beautiful in its simplicity but utterly quiet. Will laments the way Hannibal has suddenly shut himself closed. He is far away in his mind palace, unreachable by Will. The walls are to tall, and though Will trusts he could climb them with a little effort, is best to leave Hannibal alone for a minute, let him return when he has finished whatever he is doing.

The only thing that reassures him that is nothing too problematic is that Hannibal hasn't left his house. He is still here, at least physically. He is only gnawing at their previous conversation. Stripping the bone for every last piece of clinging flesh.

Will ponders in silence what could be going on inside the profiler's mind. What could be so terrible that has him trapped so far away and that he doesn't want to share with Will.

"Don't be so rude Hannibal," Will mutters playfully, reaching for the older man's hand, stroking softly at his knuckles. "Stay with me."

Hannibal returns to him slowly, the haze of his eyes receding as he scrutinizes their point of contact. "I apologize," he whispers, shaking cobwebs from his shoulders as he turns his hand around to welcome Will's touch. "I was lost in the past."

"Don't apologize, it's alright," Will reassures him gently, bringing Hannibal's hand to his lips. "How's the food?"

Hannibal offers him a timid smile, a small thing that shines with honesty. He has stopped forcing expressions that are not his, and even if the ones he gets to muster are small fractions of them, they shine for the honesty in them and Will treasures them deeply for the same reason.

“Your cooking is surprisingly delicious,” Hannibal jabs, taking another bite at the same time his face darkens. Something growls inside Will’s chest as he watches how Hannibal’s person suit shifts, the small places where the skin is torn and shows black flesh underneath. “Though I must confess, I feel somehow disappointed, but not by your cooking.”

Hannibal doesn’t elaborate further as he digs into his food, but he doesn’t need to. Will can hear the monster salivating, the way his stomach growls unsatisfied. The hunger is growing.

Soon.

It’s just a matter of time, Will reminds himself, taking another bite of food to silence the part of him that wants to promise Hannibal a feast of flesh for next time.

Soon.

[x]

They retire to the living room soon after dinner.

The lights are off and winter is pushed away, relegated outside by the warmth coming from Will’s fireplace. The fire colors the room nicely in orange tones and the dogs are snoring softly near it. The wine and the dinner have left them buzzing pleasantly, yet still, Hannibal doesn’t seem to have recovered from the conversation.

He is still shifting between the past and the present, rolling the glass of whiskey in his hand, absent eyes fixed on the shining amber, turning the liquid against the light of the fire as if he could find an answer to his question in there. Meanwhile, Will sips at his whiskey, drinking every minuscule twitch of Hannibal’s thoughts from the mirroring armchair.

“Having a hard time trying to read me?” Hannibal mutters without lifting his gaze from his drink.

“Terribly hard,” Will agrees, making sure the pleasure in his voice is heard.

“Does it bother you?” Hannibal asks, and even if Will isn’t sure what he is asking, is still a futile question. Will loves everything that Hannibal wakes up in him.

“Not in the slightest.”

The silence is pregnant around them. The night is dark and cold, and the living room of Will’s house is warm as a womb, keeping the twin monsters inside cared for, waiting for

them to be ready to come out.

Hannibal sighs, taking the first sip of whiskey of the night. He hasn't found answers inside it, but at least he can borrow some courage from it.

"I thought about it," he confesses to Will's attentive ears, still refusing to look at him. Will wonders why is that he doesn't. If he fears that Will would recoil from him, or if he fears equally that Will would embrace him. "I thought it would make me feel terrible."

The choice of words hooks Will's attention, and he sinks his teeth in it like a dog into a rabbit. He wants to ask about it but he refrains, reminding himself to be patient, reminding himself that he cannot push Hannibal too hard or this careful and wounded monster will run away.

The corners of Hannibal's mouth tip up, hinting at a smile when he risks a glance towards Will. He is delighted at Will's internal conflict, noticing how hard Will is biting at his tongue to not ask and giving him time.

Will sees, in the twirl of Hannibal's lips and the flush of his aristocratic cheekbones, how much Hannibal is considering leaving the confession incomplete, just to torture him. But Hannibal, even if he is a psychopath, he tries so hard to be *good.* And so much more to be good for Will.

"It didn't feel terrible…" Hannibal resumes, taking another small sip, hiding the words in the whiskey. "It felt righteous," the words are sneered, and come out forced. Another stitch in the person suit that Will wants to tear.

"You're a good man, Hannibal," Will says. Hannibal huffs, disregarding Will's words, but they're truthful, even if he doesn't believe them. Hannibal has tried to be a good man, and he did a splendid job of it. Will leans forward, just enough that he can reach Hannibal's knee with his hand, albeit uncomfortably, but enough to give it a reassuring squeeze. "A good man that had to experience one of the many cruel trials of God."

Hannibal seems resolute in trying to make Will understand that there is a monster under his wool that shouldn't be loved. He squints his eyes and squares his shoulders, gripping the glass like he is considering the weight and sturdiness of it to use as a weapon, or if he should break it and use a shard to cut Will's throat.

"I recognized his face after so many years, and I watched as the light left his eyes and it felt *good,"* he confesses. Again, he wears a blank expression, there is no inflection in his tone. His words are measured, confessing a crime that he feels no remorse for. "I enjoyed killing him, and I enjoyed killing Hobbs. I did it partially for Mischa, and even less so for Abigail, but I didn't enjoy it because they were killers. I simply enjoyed it."

Will licks his lips, a small gesture that he uses when he wants to fidget, one that he uses sparingly when he wants to tame a grin. He makes sure to keep his expression schooled like a good psychiatrist and crosses his legs. He is not judging and he doesn't fear Hannibal, he is perfectly comfortable as he leans back on the armchair.

“God kills all the time, I’d wager it must feel nice to him too, or he wouldn’t do it so much,” Will tells him. He holds his tumbler loosely in his fingers, waving it slightly in the air. He does not consider it a weapon. Hannibal is safe. “Are we not made to his image after all?”

“Your God Complex is showing, Will,” Hannibal teases, releasing the tight grip on his glass. Will is safe.

“And your Savior Complex is starving you, Hannibal,” he retorts.

They breathe out a chuckle in unison, the atmosphere of the room lightening and growing less tense. Though Hannibal’s face quickly settles into stillness, like water disturbed only briefly by a stone, his face working by little twitches of thoughts. Thoughts that he doesn’t want, and thoughts he cannot escape. Thoughts he shouldn’t have and thoughts he doesn’t want to let go.

“Humanity's first sin was to eat what they shouldn’t,” Will comments a little bit bluntly. “The second one was Cain killing Abel. What’s more human than that?”

“Many would think of murder and cannibalism as something evil, the constitution of a monster.”

“What is a monster then, but a human that obeys his nature?”

“Do you think I’m human, Will?” Hannibal questions with a tilt of his head, crossing his legs similarly to Will. “You killed three people. Franklyn Froideveaux, Tobias Budge, Matthew Brown. Does that make you a God or a serial killer?”

“Tobias Budge killed Franklyn,” Will protests, faking scandalization that goes straight up Hannibal’s head.

“I know what the file says,” Hannibal says. A measured answer, telling Will how much he knows. Keeping the secret between them. “I promised to be honest with you if you were honest with me.”

Will lips twitch up and he raises his glass in a mocking salute. “You are the profiler, Hannibal,” Will deflects, returning to the question. “I will let you be the one to decide it.”

Hannibal shifts in his seat, in that particular way he shifts when he refuses to fidget. He has an open searching expression on his face, thoughtful but giving nothing away. Will is thrilled, it’s unusual for him not to know what someone is thinking. It’s been a while since someone has surprised him.

“Did you like it?” Hannibal asks, holding a breath.

“I felt powerful when I killed Matthew Brown,” Will confesses, refusing to acknowledge the thin veil that gives them plausible deniability. Hannibal wants honesty, wants to be loved. Will is going to deliver. “I felt powerful when I killed Tobias Budge, Franklyn was quite annoying, not much to say about him,” he adds with a shrug before setting his eyes on

Hannibal, looking at how taut he is holding himself, eyes wide and breath heavy when Will leans forward.

“Did you like it?” Hannibal repeats. The words leave his mouth in an awed whisper. Hope glitters in his eyes and he stays still in the armchair like a cornered man.

“Incredibly so, yes,” Will whispers, pouring all the truth into it.

Hannibal’s throat works with an audible sound, and he doesn’t move a muscle other than his Adam’s apple and his eyelids in a slow blink. The fire cracks between them, and in the general echo of the room, it can be heard the soft, mechanical tics of a clock.

“I think I should go,” Hannibal forces out, mouth cotton dry and eyes focused on Will. He says that, but he doesn’t try to stand from his seat.

He is so easy to read now, long lost the blank canvas he wears as an expression and no more rehearsed emotions. Hannibal is all desire, and hunger, and need. His appetite has grown teeth, and the monster inside him is starving. Will has fed Hannibal small scraps that have only broadened its appetite and opened its stomach, turned the abstinence into indulgence.

There’s a nascent monster living in Hannibal Lecter. One that has made a home in his heart and stomach, one that has been starved for decades. Will imagines himself tearing Hannibal’s ribcage apart, worming bloody fingers through viscera to unlock what hides there.

He imagines finding the monster, feeding it a single scrap, embracing it, and loving it.

“I think you should stay the night,” Will counters, leaving his glass on the floor with measured and slow movements so as to not present a threat.

“I don’t think that’s wise,” Hannibal refutes but again, he doesn’t make any attempt to leave. He tracks Will’s slow movements with his eyes, gripping his glass tighter, sinking the nails of his free hand into the old fabric of the armchair until his knuckles turn white.

“Because of me?” Will asks, taking short steps towards him, trying to make himself smaller as he goes, keeping his movements expected, not predatory enough to scare the profiler. He lowers himself to his knees in front of Hannibal, peeling the man’s fingers from the glass until it's released and he can put it on the floor. Will places his hands gently on Hannibal’s legs, guiding the other man to spread them and allow Will space to fit in between. “Or because of you?”

“I won’t let you go,” he tells Will with a quivering whisper. He is shaking with the need to reach for him, shivering with the effort to stop himself.

“Good,” Will says resolutely, climbing atop Hannibal’s lap with no regard for propriety and holding the man’s hungry gaze.

“I won’t let you go,” Hannibal insists with a dangerous growl that comes from deep inside him. He grips Will’s waist with blunt nails, trying to keep the psychiatrist still and not commit to this. A final warning.

Will can hear the sound of the monster tearing at Hannibal's person suit, howling, struggling against the rattling chains that have him trapped deep inside Hannibal's mind palace. He sinks more on the profiler's lap, using his weight to pin Hannibal to the armchair. He cups the man's face adoringly and gently, releasing a sigh and forcing himself not to blink.

"I'm going to kiss you now," Will tells him as he leans down, keeping Hannibal's face where he wants it, knowing that Hannibal won't struggle.

It's barely anything—just the brush of his lips against Hannibal's. There's almost no pressure, just precious, blissful contact. Their eyes close for a moment, and a sigh is shared between them. The kiss last little more than one second but the foundations of Will's house shake under them, and the world shifts from its edge. There's the sound of rusty chains breaking by the tension they're put under, and the sound of ripping fabric. The crackling air around them ignites, lights up.

Silently, for ages, Hannibal has hungered. Silently, for who knows how long, he has yearned for this moment.

Will moves millimetrically, still feeling the texture and warmth of Hannibal's lips as he pulls back. Hannibal doesn't shift, doesn't blink and his grip is just as tight as a moment before, but instead of keeping Will in place so the doctor won't move closer, this time he does it to keep Will in place. His eyes are lazy and dark, his lips slightly parted, a small opening from where comes the echo of a beast's calling.

Now, when Will opens his eyes he finds Hannibal's gaze dark and hungry pinned on him. His expression is a canvas devoid of expression. There's a drawn-out silence between them, the final contemplation.

An age passes before Hannibal shatters the silence and when he speaks, his voice comes in a low, dangerous cadence.

"I will kill you if you try to leave me," Hannibal warns him with all the love he has. He speaks quietly into the inch of space between their mouths. Like he's sharing a secret, though there's no one around to eavesdrop.

Will's smile turns into a wild, proud grin as he lowers himself down back to Hannibal's lips. "Good."

They reach for each other in the warm, dim room. Their lips part and Will tastes the sweet dampness of Hannibal's mouth, feels the small noise of a whine tearing from the profiler's core. They press their lips more firmly, and Will savors the plush give of them against his own, the pressure of Hannibal's fingers at his waist, the shared hunger.

Hannibal is the first one to break; the first one to move his hands from Will's waist to anywhere he can grab, kneading the flesh under his palms, fingers gripping at Will's hair, his body pushing against Will's. *Touch starved.* He pushes himself closer to Will, and brings Will closer still, desperate to keep every point of contact and desperate to find more.

The kiss is exploratory and rough and frantic, Hannibal's touches even more so. He worms his tongue into Will's mouth, trying to taste everything at once, moaning at the new textures he finds – the taste of Will's saliva, the warmth of Will's mouth, the pressure of his tongue, the texture of the roof of Will's mouth, the softness of his gums and the sharpness of his teeth.

Will meets him halfway, tilting their heads and guiding Hannibal to better fit together, nursing the monster under him back to health with his flesh. He grips Hannibal's jaw, angling the profiler's face exactly where he wants him, and mightily takes the onslaught, slipping his tongue into Hannibal's mouth, petting the man's hair with his free hand, and giving all of him.

Hannibal kisses like the thirsty and starving man that he is, finally finding nutrition in Will's body; Hannibal clings to him, and devours him with the ferocity of a child fearful to have the food taken away from the table. Hannibal savors and swallows without pause, and Will gentles their kiss, moving and shifting his posture, keeping himself close to Hannibal but kissing the man's neck instead, aware that Hannibal will get sick in the stomach at this pace.

Will drags his lips over the length of Hannibal's throat, savoring the rushing blood under the thin layer of skin. He can barely still taste the strong liquor under the amalgamation of their shared taste, and places soft, gentle, and lingering kisses onwards, trailing the thrum of Hannibal's veins towards the man's ear. "I'm going to wash our glasses, and put off the fire, then, I'm taking you upstairs with me, is that okay with you darlin'?" Will mutters, carefully peeling himself away from Hannibal's grip.

The kiss has gone for so long that Hannibal's lips are swollen, colored in a deliciously red and gleaming wet. He nods still in a daze, and stands up when Will does, guided by Will's hand pulling him from the armchair.

They stand close together for a moment, holding hands, their chests brushing each other's with every intake of air. Will searches Hannibal's face as he traces the blush on the profiler's high cheekbones with his thumb. "I adore you," Will confesses, voice sounding just as ruined as Hannibal looks.

When Will moves, Hannibal follows him close behind like a newfound puppy. Will's acceptance of his darkness and the kiss has finally cemented Hannibal's dependence on him.

Will's hook has pieced the soft flesh of his cheek, and the current of their relationship is kind, washing Hannibal towards Will, and Will reels him softly towards the kitchen.

Hannibal stands behind him as Will washes their glasses, the older man's head resting on Will's shoulder, content to breathe the scent of Will and wrap his arms around Will's waist. Completely at ease, floating in the still water.

Will can feel the outline of Hannibal's half-hard cock pressed against his ass, but the older man doesn't seem to care about the pressing matter. He is more than content to just be in contact with Will, fingers absently stroking Will's stomach over the clothes. Hannibal is perfectly still, obediently put and patient as Will takes his time to wash their glasses.

Will feels, perhaps more intensely about Hannibal's erection than the man himself. Hannibal doesn't move, seemingly unfazed by his own need while Will's hand threads clumsily with the glasses and he has to resist moving his hips for more contact. Will's hands are shaking slightly with the excitement; with the victory that this represents and the knowledge that he is about to take Hannibal upstairs. His fingers move clumsily enough that he sees an opportunity that is too good to pass on.

Will plans on keeping his promise, and the night *will* end with Hannibal between his sheets, but for now, Will forces his fingers on the side of the glass and breaks the crystal, the sound startling in the night's silence.

"Shit," Will curses for show as he watches blood drip from his hand into the sink. Is not a nasty cut by all means, but is just between his thumb and forefinger in the soft spot that won't stop bleeding for a while.

Behind him Hannibal tenses at the sigh, and tightens his hold at Will's waist.

Will waits patiently as blood drips, painting his fingertips a dark red. He turns his head to look at Hannibal when he feels the other man's breath catch and finds those gorgeous maroon eyes stunned, fixated on the blood.

Pieces fall into place as Will turns on Hannibal's arms to fully face him, and Will puts on his best worried mask.

"Are you alright?" He asks trying to keep the delight out of his voice when he sees Hannibal's tongue peeking to wet his lips.

"Are *you* alright?" Hannibal's voice comes out breathless and his eyes remain on the bleeding hand that Will hangs aloof. He looks dazed, more so than he looked when Will kissed him, and Will hums, forcing himself not to poke deliberately at Hannibal's soft belly on display.

"It's nothing," Will answers with a smile, cupping Hannibal's face with his unwounded hand. "You, on the other hand, look quite…" He pauses, looking for the correct word to replace the word *horny* as to not be so crass and ruin the moment. *Hungry* is another that comes close, perhaps closer. Will ends up settling with a soft, longingly muttered, "Affected."

Hannibal's breath hitches and his fingers flex, groping at Will's flesh where his hands rest at the doctor's hips. Will can still feel Hannibal's hardening cock rubbing insistently against his. The blood has done nothing to decrease it and Will can feel his own cock twitching in answer.

"I feel affected."

Will finds endearing how proper and careful Hannibal always behaves, but it has been for far too long, and it's time for him to stop ignoring his urges.

Will has never had those kinds of reservations, and he begins a pleasant movement of his hips, dragging his cock against Hannibal's that stutters a gasp. Hannibal drops his head, and Will feels the man's whole body shivering, delighted by the way the profiler clings to his

body. His cock twitches inside his pants with each nudge of Will's and those blond ashes fan over his beautiful face.

Hannibal breathes ragged and shaking, his lips are parted, and his dark pupils are gapping with hunger as he tries to keep them focused on Will's eyes. The attempt is useless, nothing escapes Will's eyes, less so when he is so focused on his prey. Hannibal's eyes keep returning to the wound on Will's hand.

"Oh darlin'," Will mumbles adoringly, fisting a good amount of Hannibal's hair between his bloodless fingers, forcing the man to lift his face. Hannibal looks like a puppet with his strings cut, reduced only to hunger and lust. "You're starving."

Hannibal's eyes are glazed, his lips parted. His grip has turned painful, and his breath erratic. He looks like he is about to vibrate off his skin or eat Will.

Will doesn't mind the latter as much, and he decides to give the man a little taste of what he craves. Hannibal deserves it after so long hungry. He has earned it. He has been starving for so long that cannot be good for him, *poor darling thing.*

Hannibal makes a wounded noise when Will uses his bloody hand to cup his cheek, and forces his eyes closed to protect his mind from what is happening. A feeble excuse when his body is far more honest when he presses forward and pins Will against the kitchen counter.

"Darlin', look at me," Will coos Hannibal's eyes open with a soothing voice that is the exact opposite of the steel grip he has on the profiler's hair. He coaxes the older man's lips open with the pad of his finger, smearing blood over his chin and slipping the soaked thumb into Hannibal's wanting mouth.

They share an echoing moan as Hannibal breaks and seals his lips around Will's thumb, encasing it into the wet heat of his mouth. Will shivers, both from the sensation and from Hannibal's blissful expression as he nurses from his blood.

Darkness seeps into Hannibal's eyes, eating the maroon color from his eyes. He pins forcefully Will against the counter with his full weight, one of his hands leaving Will's waist to quickly snatch Will's wrist and keep the man's finger on his mouth.

"Take as much as you want, darlin', as much as you need."

"You need to clean it," Hannibal's protest is a weak thing, clearly forced and easily dismissed when he sucks Will's finger back inside his mouth.

"Keep going," Will says, ignoring the protest, watching the minuscule expressions on Hannibal's face as he tries to keep hold of his desires. "Darlin', keep going, take everything you want, I'll open another for you if you need it."

Hannibal closes his eyes with another groan, and tightens his grip on Will's wrist, finally breaking. He releases the stark clean finger into the cold air and Will moans as Hannibal opens his mouth wider and sucks directly from the cut.

Hannibal is beautiful like this, more so than usual. Freed, finally released from the shackles of morality as he drinks eagerly from Will's hand, biting softly to coax more blood to spill into his mouth, showing those sharp canines that are made to tear flesh.

Doubt begins to worm into his expression, in the soft spot between his brows. "You need to stitch this," Hannibal whispers, lips still brushing the wound, fingers still tightly wrapped around Will's wrist. Is endearing to see how he tries to collar himself back into a person suit, trying so hard to be what he thinks a good man is.

Endearing, but also disappointing.

Will won't allow it. He wants Hannibal like this, free and deadly and well-fed.

"No."

Will pushes his hand back towards Hannibal's lips. The man shivers and squeezes Will's wrist painfully. He smears, showing more of those perfect fangs. Will wants them on his neck, on any part of him really. He wants Hannibal's lips painted with his blood or the blood of a kill. But mostly, he wants Hannibal free.

Oh, and on his bed, *right now.*

"Bedroom, now," Will tells him, tugging at Hannibal's hair and pushing him towards the general direction of the stairs across from the kitchen.

"The glasses – your wound," Hannibal tries to complain but he finds it difficult to speak when Will presses his mouth to his and a moan interrupts his words.

"Damn if I care."

Will maneuvers them through the house and up the stairs, smearing blood on their clothes as he makes sure to blindly pull off as many pieces of clothing as he can from the profiler.

They end up falling on the bed, and Will makes a sharp *tsk* noise once he straddles Hannibal's lap, making the dogs leave the room.

Hannibal looks so beautiful under him, gaze nebulous with lust and shirt halfway undone, with Will's blood painting his cheek. His hands are as hungry as his mouth as he struggles with Will's clothes, fingers clumsy and desperate losing a fight with the buttons of Will's shirt. He shivers violently under Will and the pendulum swings.

Will doesn't try to make it swing, but all of Hannibal's twitches and tells are in plain sight and Will has to stop to watch; the way Hannibal's whole body is shaking with every caress, the vibrant blush on his cheekbones, the soft sounds he makes. The nervous twitches of his hand and the goosebumps that spread all over his strong arms.

Hannibal has spent all his life suppressing every urge, his hunger, and his desires. He killed once and stopped himself out of sheer force of will. He ate human flesh and turned vegetarian, ignoring his cravings.

Violence is something that he shouldn't enjoy; hunger is something he shouldn't have; desire, something that he shouldn't indulge; love, something that he didn't deserve because he ached for all those other terrible things.

"Oh, Hannibal," Will sighs, utterly and completely, honestly in love.

Will didn't know – even if he had known, he wouldn't have changed his plans, but he would have been slower tonight, and would have let Hannibal savor their kisses a little more.

No point in crying over spilled milk and broken teacups though. Will can still make Hannibal's first time as beautiful and perfect as he deserves.

Will slows his movements on Hannibal's lap and grabs the profiler's wrists, bringing the older man's hand to his lips and kissing those long, gorgeous artist's fingers with all the reverence they deserve.

Hannibal has artist's hands.

The pendulum swings again, bringing Will to the future, and showing him Botticelli on a canvas of death. It swings again back to the present, where Hannibal is under him with wide, hopeful eyes so full of love that Will's heart swells.

He can see all of Hannibal's potential.

Will, The Copy-Cat, is deadly, but Hannibal, whatever he can become, is Death itself.

Will lowers himself over Hannibal's body. He touches the profiler with such reverence, a priest holding a sacred artifact, a worshipper prostrated at an altar, forehead against the floor. He kisses Hannibal with tenderness, and the touch of Hannibal's tongue against him feels like being one with God.

"Darlin', you weren't made for abstinence," Will sighs against his mouth, kissing Hannibal's cupid bow, then his lower lip. He kisses every inch like it deserves to be kissed, with tender admiration and a hunger that matches his. Will kisses Hannibal's lips, his cheeks, his chin, over the thin skin of his eyelids, feeling the tickling sensation of Hannibal's lashes. Will sighs dreamily, feeling his own body shaking with all the love he has threatening to burst from him. He holds Hannibal's face and locks their gazes both indubitably enamored with the other, feeding each other in a never-ending loop. "You were made for hedonism Hannibal, and I'll make sure you never go hungry again."

It's a promise, one that Will intends to keep, and he seals it with a new kiss.

"We'll go slowly, take our time," he mutters into Hannibal's mouth, unbuttoning the rest of the profiler's shirt so it falls open at the sides. He grabs Hannibal's hand and guides them to his own chest. Hannibal is hungry and he moves them with the wonder of a man experiencing a fest for the first time, slowly mapping Will's body without knowing what he wants except to touch everything that is in reach.

Will guides Hannibal through it, running his fingers gently through the strands of Hannibal hair and throwing his own shirt far away, coaxing Hannibal to touch his chest.

“Take your time, darlin’,” Will speaks softly, emphasizing his drawl to get that lovely blush on Hannibal’s cheeks. Hannibal shivers for him in answer, his artist's hands clenching, sinking in the spaces between Will’s ribs.

Hannibal is so strong and desperate for him that he will leave his fingertips tattooed on Will’s body. Will wants him to. Wants Hannibal finally free of all his inhibitions.

Will rolls his hips in encouragement and hangs his head back with a moan. He can feel the way Hannibal is trying to restrain himself. It’s admirable how he forces himself to remain sweet and kiss gently at Will’s throat. No bites, no sucking, no bruises. Nothing that can indicate any sign of deviation.

Hiding. Suppressing. Starving.

“You have such beautiful teeth,” Will mutters in awe, running appreciative thumbs over Hannibal’s lips as he cups the profiler’s face.

Hannibal closes his eyes and makes a pained expression. *Poor, poor thing* . Will wants to break him, wants Hannibal to snap and lose all his control and he wants to be the cause of it.

And he will.

Will gives Hannibal another kiss, a peck on the lips that is all sweet and loving before he steps away from the profiler’s lap.

Hannibal *whines,* reaching desperately for him, aching from the cold outline that Will’s absence leaves on his body.

“Sh, sh, darlin’, I’m not going far,” Will holds Hannibal’s hand and he goes to the bedside table to retrieve the lubricant. He takes a moment to observe Hannibal from above. Hannibal is so incredibly needy right now. Yes, the tent of his pants is quite obscene, but Will barely spares a glance at it. The need is in Hannibal’s eyes and Hannibal’s parted mouth, he is looking at Will like he is the only thing worth looking at, lips parted as to wait for Will’s tongue to sink back inside. The maroon of his pupils have been swallowed by darkness, his lips are parted in the shape of a moan. His eyes are dazed and hazy with love and with desire and the want to be touched and be seen and be loved. The flush on his cheeks has darkened. His teeth glisten like the steel of a knife.

He is so beautiful, and he is all Will’s.

Will returns to the bed placing his knees on the mattress. He undresses slowly, throwing his jeans on the floor. He clicks his tongue as he slips his fingers under the elastic of his boxers, forcing Hannibal’s eyes to snap to his.

“Off,” Will indicates, tapping Hannibal’s remaining clothes.

Hannibal scurries to obey, taking off his pants and underwear with rushed movements and shaky hands. Will slides slowly his boxers down his legs as a reward, watching the way Hannibal's eyes follow the piece of underwear revealing his shaft.

Will crawls naked on the bed in the same slow way he has moved this whole evening. He brackets Hannibal's hips with his knees and both moan when their bodies touch.

"Next time, I'll have you like you deserve," Will tells him as he rolls his hips, sliding their cocks together and smearing slick all over their stomachs. "I'll fill the bed with roses and candles, and have you slowly, all night," he promises, every movement is another inch he is reeling Hannibal in, and every kiss has a little more pressure to make the profiler snap. He kisses Hannibal's jawline, moving his wet lips to whisper in the older man's ear like he is the physical manifestation of an intrusive thought. "But for now, I need you to do something for me."

Hannibal blinks slowly, lazily as he nods. His flesh molds under Will's hands like wax, and he stays where Will puts him. And Will smiles, opening the lubricant's cap and smearing a good amount over his fingers. He watches as Hannibal's attentive eyes follow his hand down, pulsing when Will gives a tentative stroke to their cocks before he moves it lower, reaching behind himself with a deep moan made exclusively for Hannibal's pleasure. This time, Will allows Hannibal to watch as much as he wants while Will slips his slicked fingers under his balls and reaches to massage his hole, smearing cold lubricant around it.

Next time, he will take his time with preparation, will teach Hannibal how he wants to be touched, will let Hannibal take his time to study all his reactions, have Will in bed writhing on his fingers for as long as Hannibal wants, will take everything Hannibal wants to give him.

But for now, Will breaches one insistent finger inside himself, ignoring the sting of pain and the protests of his unprepared body. Today is not for lovemaking. Tonight is exclusively to release Hannibal from the useless moral compass he is subjecting himself to. And to have Hannibal's dick inside him for once, thankfully.

"Hannibal," Will moans, pressing another finger inside with a sharp inhale, forcing his body to relax. "I want your teeth, and I want your claws," Will tells him, scissoring his fingers to open himself as quickly as he can. He uses his clean hand to grip Hannibal's hand and guides the profiler to slip one finger along with his inside the stretching hole.

Hannibal releases a stuttering breath, and grips Will's arm with the other hand, flesh giving under the bite of his nails, ready to bloom in purple when morning comes. Hannibal moves his finger tentatively and Will drops his weight onto it, chasing the sensation, searching for the pleasure that he knows will eventually come.

Hannibal moves his finger much more tentatively than Will does, testing the give of his flesh, brushing their knuckles together as the tip of Hannibal's finger maps the texture of his body, nudging at the hot flesh, searching for that spot he knows will give Will pleasure.

"I want you," Will insists, encouraging the profiler's touch inside him and reaching with his clean hand to the back of Hannibal's head, guiding the man to kiss his throat, trying to satisfy

Hannibal’s and overwhelm all of Hannibal’s senses. He clenches his hole around their fingers, sucking them inside, and brushes his lips to the arch of Hannibal’s ear, whispering promises of darkness and love. “I want all of you.”

Will takes their fingers out of him and his hole clenches pitifully and painfully around the air for a second before he grabs Hannibal’s cock with his dirty hand, aiming it inside him, and sinks onto it, taking it in as deep as he can through the clench of his teeth. It punches all the air away from Hannibal's lungs with a deep moan, and Will has to bite his tongue to keep the wounded scream inside his mouth.

Will moves up and down carefully and steadily, holding Hannibal’s neck in his hand when the man shivers and throws it back in pleasure. He ignores the burn of the stretch, focused only on the way darkness clouds Hannibal’s eyes, pushing him near the cliff. This is not a moment for pleasure. Pleasure will come later. This is about freedom, birthing something ugly together and making it beautiful.

It is like watching a hurricane forming. Every brush of Hannibal’s cock sinking another inch inside is another gush of wind growing stronger, the sky turning grey before it hides the sun.

“Don’t hide from me, darlin’,” Will says, chasing the oncoming storm. “Give me all of you so I can love you.”

Under Hannibal's soft-looking clothes and kind demeanor, he is all muscle and contained violence; under the precariously stitched person-suit he wears, there is a monster, and finally, with those simple words, with the promise of understanding and love, the monster comes out.

"Yes," Will moans as his back collides with the mattress. Hannibal is so strong, pushing him around and turning them in bed with one hand fisted in Will's curls, the other holding the doctor by the slim waist.

Will struggles just for the pleasure of it, just to feel Hannibal pinning him down onto the mattress with his strong body, with the older man's fangs worrying a patch of the thin skin of his throat.

Will moans again as he feels Hannibal bite harder at his throat in warning, how his grip bruises Will's flesh as he thrusts deeper inside. He spreads his legs wider at each side of Hannibal until the stretch is almost as burning as the stretch of his hole. Hannibal's pelvis fits beautifully against his ass and Hannibal's thick cock is buried deep inside him, filling every needy space of him.

There’s a moment of panic, a flash of utter, real terror that crosses Hannibal’s eyes. Horrified by his own slip, for the way he has lost control. The grip of his fingers softens and he wants to kiss Will gently, take a moment to stitch his person suit back together.

“No,” Will mewls, pulling his lips back, showing the gleam of his teeth as he grabs Hannibal painfully tight by the hair. “Don’t go back now, I want you,” Will says, keeping Hannibal exactly where he is teetering on the edge of the cliff, just about to stumble and fall right into Will’s embrace.

Hannibal tries to pull back, only a little, but Will keeps him firmly where he is, and locks his eyes with the profiler's.

"All of you, Hannibal," Will repeats, not risking a single second to blink. "No matter how dark, no matter how terrible. I'm here with you, I *see* you, and I want you, and I love you."

Hannibal's mouth drops open, his eyes close, and from his throat comes out a sound that starts broken and fully transforms into a monstrous growl when he presses his lips against Will's.

Goodbye to the nice and pure Hannibal Lecter, may he rest in peace at Will's feet.

Long live whatever monster is coming out of him.

"Yes!" Will's eyes roll inside his head with pleasure as he tries to catch on with Hannibal's punishing rhythm. The man is full of blind hunger, sucking Will's skin into his mouth like he could taste the rushing blood underneath it. His thrusts are reckless with inexperienced need and his hands are everywhere, leaving white half-moons wherever he grips at Will's flesh or running white lines at Will's back that quickly turn to a burning pink.

"Yes darlin', let go, give me everything," Will moans again, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's shoulders and spreading his legs as wide as they can go, matching Hannibal's need with the movements of his hips as he chases the profiler's cock.

Will kisses whatever inch he can reach of Hannibal's skin, tasting the drops of sweat that cling to him, trailing the line of the profiler's sharp jaw with his tongue hoping to get cut and be able to feed Hannibal more of his blood. He curves his back to have more of their skin in contact, his cock weeping slick against Hannibal's soft stomach, smearing precum all over the patch of dark-blond pubic hair. Will tilts his head to the side, happy to give Hannibal more flesh to bite, delirious with pleasure and victory every time Hannibal sucks a new bruise on his throat or bites at his shoulder or sinks his nails at the tender flesh.

Hannibal is a mess over him. He is desperate to get his mouth on Will's body, madly chasing his orgasm as he shivers with the new sensations. His hips snap against Will's in earnest, burying himself deep inside of Will at a ruthless and mindless pace. Will can't think, he can't breathe. He can only let go of his voice, hearing himself babble a constant rain of choked sounds, crying out *yes, yes, yes* to whatever Hannibal does, whatever Hannibal wants.

And *oh, does he wants.* Hannibal is consumptive by nature, forced down and caged by his hand. Now freed, he is gorging himself on Will, and Will will give him anything that he wants.

It's a primal thing. Hannibal's eyes are pitch black, mouth parted in awe. His skin sheens with sweat, strands of hair sticking up to his forehead and cheekbones. He looks so utterly wrecked that it makes Will's cock throb, and makes Will grin with feral delight and pride.

Hannibal is lost in his pleasure, moving with abandon, holding Will down, closing his mouth around every inch of flesh he can get his teeth on. Will's shoulders are already a bloody mess, his throat aches, and his chest is Hannibal's mouth's next target.

Pain and pleasure mix perfectly together as Will writhes under Hannibal, prey of those sharp, beautiful fangs as the profiler leaves rings of teeth over milky skin. Will's nipples, he knows, will be sore and wet with spit by the time Hannibal finishes, and there is not a world in which Will won't love it.

Hannibal is everywhere, impaling him inside, torturing Will out of his mind. He has made his new home inside Will's mind and has taken the doctor's heart hostage with him. He is smoldering hot around Will, slick with sweat and the precum that spreads between them. His teeth are marking Will's arms, his nails sinking into the flesh of his waist. Hannibal is gone, reduced to a beast, rutting inside Will, slipping his tongue inside Will's mouth, groaning and shaking as he chases his orgasm with no regard for Will's.

Will welcomes the sudden spasms of Hannibal's strong body with open arms and spread legs. Hannibal's orgasm is violent, something other altogether, raw in its ferocity. Will is enthralled by it, forgetting about his pleasure just to watch every minuscule twitch and spam, memorizing the way Hannibal's skin shines and how his hair falls messily over his face, how his jaw drops and his breath comes out in harsh pants. Will wants to remember everything of this moment. He watches it like a solemn witness to something monstrously sacred and beyond human that he treasures deep inside his mind, slowly caressing Hannibal's body with wonder.

Hannibal drops on top of him in a second, all his weight on Will's body and Will bears it gladly and adoring, running playful fingers along Hannibal's strong back, following the line of his vertebrae, enjoying his work every time he finds uneven, bleeding terrain for future scabs.

Will's own cock is still throbbing with need, but he hardly pays it any mind, more focused on watching the heavy breaths that move Hannibal's chest.

Hannibal lifts his eyes, hazy with pleasure and bottomless. He moves slightly, and Will watches the moment in which realization dawns upon him.

"You didn't come," Hannibal points out with ragged breath, shifting over Will's body.

"Yeah, is alright, I'll survive," Will shrugs, sounding out of breath as he reaches for Hannibal to stroke his cheek just for the profiler to slap his hand away. He startles Will as he lowers himself down with no hesitation and throws Will's legs over his shoulders.

Yeah, Will *really* has a new kink about being manhandled.

Will quickly grabs a fistful of Hannibal's hair, and with his other hand a good portion of the bedsheet on his clenched fist. Hannibal wriggles himself into a comfortable position lower on the bed and starts sucking kisses on Will's lower abdomen. It's less tender than before, and his kisses have the edge of teeth as he sucks patches of skin inside his mouth.

"Take your time," Will gasps, shivering with every new touch, eyes fixated on Hannibal's peaceful expression.

Hannibal does take his time. He doesn't take Will's cock inside his mouth at first, content to run his lips over Will's skin. He takes especially delight in keening the meat of Will's thighs in his hands, nuzzling at the coarse and thick hair that covers Will's legs. He bites softly at first, and Will hisses. The inner side of his thighs is a lot more sensitive, but when Hannibal lifts his eyes to check on him Will is just as quick to encourage him with a nod, combing his fingers through Hannibal's hair.

Will's dick remains untouched but painfully hard, smearing more and more precum over his lower abdomen. Hannibal increases the pressure of his teeth with every bite, leaving red marks all over Will's thighs. He licks the crevice between his legs and his navel with a deep moan and bliss written all over his face. It's beautiful to watch, and Will's chest fills with pride.

Hannibal moves slowly, savoring every inch of Will in the true cannibal fashion he has never had the chance to experience before. His tongue sinks in every crevice of Will, and his teeth sink into the tender flesh that he finds in reach.

Will finds Hannibal's drunken eyes in the dark and relaxes on the bed, spreading his legs further over Hannibal's shoulders. His cock throbs knowing what's coming, and Will knows the moment Hannibal seals his lips around his flesh he will be gone for good.

"Go ahead," Will mutters, bringing his arms under his head to cushion it, leaving Hannibal to do as he pleases with him. "I know you won't bite."

It's meant as a joke, but Will catches the moment the idea sparkles behind Hannibal's eyes, and he files that away for later. It's a tempting idea, just as tempting as it is dangerous, but Will knows how to make it work. Eventually.

Right now, what he wants the most is to have Hannibal's hot mouth around his cock, teeth and cannibalism be damned.

"Go on, darlin'," Will insists, moving his hips in a tentative thrust.

Hannibal's eyes zero onto his cock, and he licks his lips as he trails the new drop peeking from the tip. He wraps his fingers around the base of Will's cock, and Will inhales sharply at the contact, shivering with the first stroke of Hannibal's hand. Is not altogether dry with how much Will's cock is steadily spilling precome, but the contact is sharp on his over-sensitive flesh, sending a mix of pain and pleasure up his spine.

Will doesn't say anything else to rush Hannibal to take him into his mouth, allowing the profiler to take his time. With every new stoke Hannibal's touch becomes more wet and more pleasurable, and he keeps his eyes pinned on Will's cock, more focused on the reactions of Will's body than on Will. He is endearing to watch, and Will wishes he could have him like this all night, all the time Hannibal wanted. Willingly become Hannibal's playground or next victim, whatever he needs to satisfy his needs.

Hannibal keeps licking his lips as if he could taste him by the scent in the air, and very slowly he moves closer, his tongue peeking from between plush lips to trail up Will's cock with one long stroke.

It feels like sticking his fingers into an electric socket and Will has his body giving in to a violent shudder. “Damn,” he curses, gripping the sheets tighter with one hand, spine curving forward and pushing him away form the mattress and closer to Hannibal's mouth.

Hannibal looks up at him with confused eyes, suddenly woken up from a dazed state and Will forces himself to breathe and calm down.

“Do whatever you want, darlin’,” Will pants, “But I’m not sure how long I’m going to last if you keep teasing me like this.”

A playful glint decorates Hannibal’s eyes, and he gives Will’s cock a painfully slow stroke. His smile sharpens slightly, and Will thinks those words have just condemned him to a night of torture under Hannibal’s hands, but luckily, Hannibal is not as cruel as he could be, or as Will would be with him. Hannibal instead gives in without any more preamble, sealing his lips around the spongy head and robbing Will of all the air inside his lungs with a well-placed lick before he sinks onto his cock.

Pleasure burns through Will, settling heavily on his lower abdomen and Hannibal doesn’t give him a moment to catch up. He sinks and starts bobbling his head up and down all the way, making up for the lack of technique with his enthusiasm. He moans around Will’s cock, sending vibrations through him that only push Will towards a faster release.

Hannibal’s mouth is glorious, the most perfect kind of hot and wet. For his lack of experience still, Hannibal is sucking him with the grace he does everything in his life, fluid movements of his head and a way of moving his tongue that would put harlots to shame. He moans around his mouthful, followed by sucking sounds that travel directly from Will’s ears to his cock.

Spit leaks from the corners of Hannibal’s mouth, spilling down Will’s shaft, pooling over his balls, and dampening the sheets further. Hannibal digs his fingers into the flesh of Will’s asscheeks, keening it on his hands as he continues taking him as far inside his mouth as he can, trying to suck Will’s soul out of him.

Will trashes on the bed, squeezing Hannibal’s head between his thighs without conscious thought. At this point, he will end up tearing the sheets into rags as he trembles. Pleasure is running through him, pulling back and pushing again, ready to spill inside Hannibal’s beautiful mouth. His orgasm is peaking and Will rolls his eyes inside his head, one of his hands flying to pull at his own hair to keep it at bay. He cannot thrust in Hannibal’s mouth as he wishes, Hannibal is holding him down with his own hands and the weight of his body, driving Will out of his mind with every new mindless movement.

“I’m close, Hannibal, fuck,” Will moans, trying to open his eyes to look at Hannibal. The profiler’s eyes are also closed, but the bliss still clings to his factions. Will breathes in deeply, trying to calm himself just a little bit enough to speak. He softens his voice and lifts his left hand to brush away the bangs that fall over Hannibal’s closed eyes. “Do you want me to cum inside your mouth, darlin’?”

Blown pupils meet Will’s eyes from between pale lashes. Hannibal’s eyes are wet with reflective tears, lashes stuck together. The white sclera is tinted with rabid pink and

glistening. Hannibal looks utterly undone just like Will wanted, and far more gorgeous than Will pictured.

Hannibal nods still with Will’s cock inside his mouth, giving an affirmative hum as he sucks around the head, licking the new drop of slick that spills over his tongue. Hannibal takes him deeper, up to the back of his mouth, and then swallows Will’s whole, fighting against his gag reflex until his cock finally breaks past the barrier of his muscles and sets deep on the back of his throat.

It’s so damp, heavenly hot, and so *fucking* tight, and Hannibal’s throat compresses around his cock like Hannibal’s body wants to absorb him into himself. It’s all Will can take and he convulses with a loud groan, legs trembling over Hannibal’s shoulders.

The orgasm extends endlessly and Hannibal keeps sucking, pushing Will further than he can take and forcing him up to take it all. Hannibal moans as he drinks Will inside him, pulling Will’s cock away from the back of his throat to the forefront of his mouth to savor him properly.

Will collapses, exhausted on the bed like a dead body with a deep, satisfied sigh. Hannibal doesn't stop there, he keeps licking at his softening cock. He drinks up until he has milked Will down, taken until the last drop. The sensation is overwhelming and painful, but Will forces himself to spread his legs, mewling with every twirl of Hannibal's tongue. Curls stick to his forehead as the sheets stick to his back. The adrenaline is leaving him and his body starts catching up on the extent of the physical exertion he forced it through. His hole gapes around nothing, it stings all the way inside as Hannibal's cum drips down. His cock still trapped inside Hannibal's damp mouth burns, and his muscles ache with the effort. And he hasn't even caught up with the bruises.

A delightful problem for tomorrow.

Time slows down as Hannibal leans back, lifting his spit-glistening chin as he licks his lips with a proud smile when he releases Will's cock from torture.

"Damn," Will chuckles a pitiful as he convulses again. Incredibly, he finally falls completely onto the bed, just realizing how tight his body remained a moment ago.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asks, not sounding worried at all. He sounds properly like himself, a little bit proud. He is not bragging, but he is smiling, looking absolutely pleased with himself. Will would be snickering if he wasn't so drunk with pleasure and victory.

Will shakes his head with a weak laugh, and through the exhaustion and ache, he lifts his hand to cup Hannibal's cheek. "Not bad for your first time," he jokes. Hannibal chuckles quietly, attempting a playful bite at Will's finger. The blush Hannibal carries on his sharp cheekbones deepens and a tender smile breaks on his face as he looks down at Will.

He is lovely. Will truly loves him.

“Come here, I think I have some places still for you to bite,” Will mutters, guiding Hannibal to lay on top of him, both shifting slowly to accommodate the other, sweat-covered bodies

fitting perfectly together over dirty sheets. Hannibal rests his head on top of Will's shoulder, and wraps himself around the doctor, settling comfortably around Will and kissing softly the skin he has in reach.

Will sighs, closing his eyes. He is utterly exhausted, but Hannibal’s promise of what he would do if Will ever left him comes to his mind, and again, Will doesn’t think there exists a universe in which he would even consider it.

“I won't ever leave you, Hannibal,” Will mutters softly, placing a kiss atop Hannibal's head. "You’ll have to kill me if you ever want to get rid of me," he says plainly, convinced of his own words.

Hannibal doesn't answer, but he shifts around him, tightening his grip around Will's body.

Chapter End Notes

Lots of love to Rubi and Peppertae for keeping me sane while writing this. And another of Louhetar because your support and excitement for this work is REALLY appreciated, darling.

I haven't been able to answer all the comments yet, but know that I read them all and I'm very thankful for each one. See you all tomorrow!

Teeth

Chapter Notes

More biting, and more blowjobs, and something, something about Hannibal's psyche.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is a before and there is an after, and the line that divides them is Will.

There is a reason why Hannibal never before pursued connections after Lady Murasaki. A reason why Hannibal repressed all his urges, suppressed himself, and ignored all his darkest desires.

If Hannibal never indulges his desires, then he will never know what he is lacking. He can live peacefully in solitude and perfect obliviousness. Comfortable enough. He knows that the more he indulges, the more he would want, and the more difficult it would be to keep his desires at bay. If he indulged his desires, it would be almost impossible to suppress again.

Hannibal knew the moment he knew Will, that he accepted Will's advances, he would be lost. And yet still, he allowed himself to indulge in Will. The more time he spends with Will, the more desires he indulges in, and now he is craving more.

Now, Hannibal is in Will's bed, watching the doctor sleep peacefully as if he wasn't sleeping in a monster's arms. Now, Hannibal is in Will's bed, dealing with the fallout that it brings having indulged in Will.

Hannibal had confessed to him thing he shouldn't, craving for Will's approval and expecting Will to push him away. Will knows things he shouldn't, more than Hannibal had confessed, and still had brought the profiler to his bed, had spread his legs for him, and welcomed Hannibal inside his bed and his life.

Hannibal is experiencing, for maybe the first time in his life, how it feels to be properly seen, stripped bare to his bone marrow where the darkness clings, and yet still, *yet still,* looking at it, still being loved – it's not all the darkness though, Hannibal reminds himself, though he doesn't doubt that Will must suspect of his darker vices and yet still, *yet still,* Will loves him.

Will loves him.

What a strange, beautiful, terrifying thing.

Hannibal keeps a blank expression on his face as he watches Will sleep, the soft curls that Hannibal has finally learned the texture of spread on top of his chest, weaved through Hannibal's fingers as he runs his nails over Will's scalp.

Will has encouraged Hannibal's vices, has encouraged him to stop repressing himself and indulge and take what he wants. What Hannibal wanted was Will, and now he has him.

Hannibal shouldn't get the things that he wants. He doesn't know what he will do now if Will wants to leave him. If Will's love for him ends up not being enough for Will to ignore the faults and horrors in Hannibal – if Will decides not to love him anymore, just like Lady Murasaki did.

Hannibal knows what he is capable enough to do if it were to happen.

What he will do when it eventually happens.

He has enough knowledge to do it now, he won't be caught. He doesn't think he could get his heart broken a second time and don't snap.

The light enters through the far window on the other side of the room, obscured by the curtains. Will is beautiful and bloody. Tacky blood has dried on him, on his shoulders, and on the sheets, smeared all over his throat. His usual white skin is covered with blooming bruises and the marks of Hannibal's teeth, and yet still he sleeps peacefully, seemingly unbothered by it.

It reminds Hannibal of an old case he witnessed. He hadn't cared enough about the families after they solved it to remember their names, but the case had stuck with him to this day – not the case exactly, but the movies. Homemade movies, the small window of domesticity, the flashes of love, of women smiling to the camera and children playing, dogs trotting in the background, the affection that stays after years of well-born love. Love that Hannibal has never experienced and only watched through the lenses of other people's eyes and dreamed of without real hope of finding for himself.

The scene of Will sleeping in his arms reminds him of it, the closest thing to that that Hannibal can experience, though is tinted. Will reminds him of those women in the videos and their corpses after, he looks like he has come from the pictures of their crime scenes. A middle ground, a limbo between life and death.

"Creep," Will mutters, voice hoarse with sleep. One blue eye peeks open from between those beautiful long lashes, not sharp enough yet slightly hazed with sleep but amused. "How long have you been watching me sleep?"

A soft smile caresses Hannibal's lips and his chest fills with adoration as he snuggles closer to the doctor, pressing his nose to the mop of curls.

"The better part of an hour I think."

Will hums happily as he shifts, wriggling himself closer to Hannibal. "That sounds boring, I'm sure there's something more interesting to do," he says, slipping one of his legs between Hannibal's thighs and nuzzling into the thick chest hair, hands fitted around Hannibal's waist.

“Perhaps later,” Hannibal deflects, not quite able to hide his inner turmoil. Will’s single open eye flickers to his and the doctor stiffens. He is not a fool, even if he is not as sharp first thing in the morning, he senses that something is wrong. There’s a moment when he squints his eyes like he could pull Hannibal’s thoughts from his. For a moment Hannibal thinks that Will maybe can see through him and pull that invisible thread that keeps the darkness contained. The only thing he needs to do is ask *‘What are you thinking about?’* and all of Hannibal’s thoughts will spill, dark and thick over him without Hannibal being capable of stopping them.

For a moment, Hannibal thinks this will be the moment of revelation when Will realizes completely who is in his bed and Hannibal will have no other option but to kill him before Will can reject him.

That’s the only way Hannibal can deal with love after all, through his stomach.

But the moment ends without blood as the fight leaves Will and a smile grazes his lips that he hides kissing Hannibal’s collarbone. “I’m moving too fast?” He teases, knowing that he has been bolder and will continue being so, but giving Hannibal an easy escape. How kind Will can be when he feels inclined to, or when Hannibal is the one on the receiving end.

A part of Hannibal is grateful for the way Will takes care of him, but it is eclipsed by the part of him that delights in Will’s cruelty and craves to be seen and accepted. “You know it’s not that,” he says, almost with a suicidal impulse.

Will’s eyes flash, gleaming like a knife under the morning sun. He cranes his head slightly, showing the stark mark of Hannibal’s teeth on his throat and his own sharp teeth when his smile pulls his lips back. “What is it then?”

“I hurt you, and you bleed through the night,” Hannibal confesses, his fingers twitching over Will’s body. “I wish to look at them, disinfect them.”

The smile in Will’s lips fades and the sharpness slowly returns to his scrutinizing eyes. “Sure,” he says, voice cold. He shifts to get more comfortable, running a hand up Hannibal’s chest as he gentles his expression, craning his head to reveal more of his bruised throat. “You said you wanted to look at them, take your time then.”

Hannibal inhales sharply and tenses. He sends a reprobatory glare at Will and the doctor chuckles, returning to place his cheek on Hannibal’s chest. “Do we have it to do it now or can I convince you to stay in bed a little more? I know my breath must stink but can I get a kiss?”

His words are sweet and he has softened his voice in the way his body is soft. Soft like a lie, and illusion. Will is all muscle, rough and sharp edges hidden under soft clothes and an absurd amount of dog fur.

Hannibal squeezes Will’s arm, too strong for the sedentary life of a psychiatrist, but fit for who he is. Hannibal can picture him running through the woods with the dogs, chopping wood for the fireplace, and repairing things in his shred. Hannibal goes to kiss him, just as sweet as Will feigns he is, as soft as Hannibal tries to be. The hunger in it when Hannibal

opens his mouth and Will slides his tongue inside that's real. Just as real as Will's naked body pressed unbelievably against his.

"I'll go make breakfast," Hannibal mumbles against Will's lips, feeling the younger man tense up. There is another moment in which he thinks Will is going to insist, beg him to stay and Hannibal won't be able to refuse. There's a part of him that wants Will to insist and keep indulging in the terrifying sensation of Will atop of him.

But Will knows how to train his dogs and he smiles cruelly, shrugging as he rolls away from Hannibal and returns to sleep on his own, leaving a pulsing, vacant cold space on Hannibal's skin.

"Wake me up when it's ready," he says, rewarding the behavior he wants to see repeated and punishing the behavior he wants to eradicate.

And just like a chastised dog, Hannibal gets up from the bed and drags himself to the kitchen.

[x]

Hannibal is dressed. Unsurprisingly, Will is not.

Will is slowly sipping a cup of coffee on the bed, leg spread widely while he flaunts shamelessly his bruised skin and milky white semen clinging to his inner thighs. Will's cock hangs flaccid between his legs, while Hannibal's begins to fill uncomfortably inside his slacks.

"You wanted to look," Will says with a dangerous grin, bending one knee towards his chest and revealing more of his naked body. His hole is a rabid pink in the edges, and it pulses open slightly, revealing how Hannibal's semen slips out of him. "Then look."

"I meant–"

"I know what you meant to mean," Will interrupts, putting the coffee away on the side table. He resumes the previous position on the bed, spreading his legs further and laying comfortably on it with a sinful curve of his back, the muscle of his arms marked as he brings his arms over his head. "I also know what you *actually* want, so, go, take a look."

Hannibal goes dreamily, trying to keep his joy only simmering inside him. "I still should disinfect them, at least," he mumbles as he sits at Will's right on the bed, leaning down to kiss the doctor's shoulder, very close to one of the nastiest marks he left the night before.

That one will scar, no matter how diligently Hannibal takes care of it.

Hannibal reels back and runs his hungry eyes over Will's body slowly, memorizing the color, placement, and shapes of his marks. He can't deny that he likes them, his own mark on Will forever ingrained in the doctor's body.

“You’re frowning,” Will comments, lifting his hand to stroke Hannibal’s cheek.

“I hurt you.”

“I wanted you to, I still want you to do it again,” Will reassures him, knitting his brows together. “I can’t understand why you insist on hiding yourself from me. There’s no need.”

“Because you will find me anyway?” Hannibal chuckles, grabbing the doctor’s hand and bringing it to his lips. He kisses the fingers and takes inside his lungs the smell of their love that still clings to Will’s skin.

“Yes,” Will concedes amused. “But you could make it a lot easier for me just by sharing.”

Hannibal closes his eyes, basking in their mingled smell. He takes his time to consider it, and after a few running beats of his heart, he decides to confess. “I forgot myself last night and I hurt you,” then, he adds, with real honesty: “It bothers me that I lost control.”

Will hums a curious sound then turns back to grab his coffee without taking his hand back from Hannibal’s grasp. He finishes the coffee in big swallows, rolling Hannibal’s answer around his brain.

A long moment passes while Will rolls that last undrinkable sip of coffee that ends at the bottom of the mug with the grains. He has an absent look on his face, the one that sours his face with thought.

“Come with me,” he says, suddenly standing from the bed and guiding Hannibal to the kitchen. He deposits the mug on the sink, and leans in his naked glory against the counter with a stern expression, fixing his now sharp eyes on Hannibal. “I want us to do something, an exercise.”

“A therapy exercise?” Hannibal teases, but Will’s stern expression quickly shuts down the attempt.

“If that makes you agree, then yes,” Will says with a daring look in his eyes. He turns around and plants his palms on top of the kitchen counter, giving Hannibal his back. “I want you to bite me, right here,” Will tells him, tilting his head to the side to keep Hannibal in his peripheral vision as he taps the meaty part of muscle over his shoulder blade.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Hannibal protests.

“You *think* you shouldn’t want to hurt me, but you do,” Will retorts, without shame or judgment. “Go ahead, I don’t mind. I know you’re not a full-blown sadist, just a blooming one.”

“You are not a masochist, Will,” Hannibal tells him. It’s framed as teasing out of Hannibal’s need to exclude himself from the conversation, more for humor than to get an answer. But there’s an underline of a question somewhere around there. He doubts it though. It doesn’t fit what he knows of Will.

He still steps behind Will and rests his hands around the doctor's waist, holding him gently in place. Will, like the tease he is, leans back, pressing his naked ass to Hannibal's painfully hard cock.

"I'm starting to think I may be," Will jokes with a shrug.

"May I ask why do you believe so?" Hannibal comments, kissing the doctor's shoulder. Their bodies touch in certain spots; Hannibal's hands on his waist, Hannibal's clothed erection against the cleft of the doctor's naked ass, but Hannibal is intent on keeping the distance of the other places between them.

"Because I bought two tickets to the Opera this weekend and I'm willing to subject myself to it to go with you," he says and Hannibal shuts down at the idea. He imagines the scene, Will dressed in a gorgeous suit, looking dangerously sharp, more than usual. He can imagine Will's hair tamed, that precious curl of his falling over his forehead.

He imagines the night, with Will hanging from his arms. Will hates crowds, he would be pretty and sweet on Hannibal's side, gentled with alcohol. He wouldn't care about the people around them or the performance. His whole attention would be centered on Hannibal, studying the man's reactions in a different environment.

Hannibal can imagine the scene with stark clarity; Will so incredibly beautiful at his side, his attention on Hannibal, his hands trying to pull Hannibal's attention back to him in the middle of the performance out of boredom, the music hanging around them. A private box for them both, perhaps, where Will can do whatever he wants and ignore the performance…

Will laughs then, bringing Hannibal back to reality as he pushes his ass back, teasing Hannibal's erection that pulses with need. "Damn, that feels painful," he says, throwing his head back and glancing at Hannibal. "You sure you're not the masochist one of the relationship?"

Hannibal's breath quivers, and he slowly leans forward, pulled by Will's manipulations and completely aware of it. He brushes his lips to the younger man's back, feeling the warmth of the doctor's body, delighted to feel Will shivering under him, just as affected as he is.

"Start slowly," Will tells him with a soft gasp, slightly breathless as he resumes his previous position. "Put your teeth there and begin to increase the pressure little by little. When it starts to hurt I'll tell you to stop."

"If I'm a sadist, do you trust me to stop?" Hannibal asks, shifting his body to press closer to Will, speaking the words against the doctor's skin. His hands shift from the doctor's waist to his lower abdomen, fingers trailing over the path of dark pubic hair that extends from his belly button down his navel.

"You don't have morals or conscience. You use your manners as a moral compass," Will explains once again, just as breathless as before, curving his back to press himself more to Hannibal, giving Hannibal the sensation that he is getting off on that fact. "I'm willing to do this for you, it would be inexcusably rude of you to not stop." Will chuckles then and throws his head back with another teasing roll of his hips, curls bouncing in the air, releasing a

breath of his scent right into Hannibal's nose. "For short? You'll stop if I tell you to because you love me."

Hannibal doesn't have an answer for that. Will is right. At this point, he would do anything that Wil tells him to do.

And he does love Will, so very much.

Hannibal's stomach twists with anticipation and his eyes drift shut as he presses another kiss to Will's shoulder blade. He takes a deep breath like he's smelling an expensive wine or a bouquet of flowers. He fits his teeth around Will's flesh, taking it inside his mouth. He can taste Will's sweat, the rich saltiness of his skin, and the iron-like scent of old blood that still clings to his dirty skin. He can also smell himself all over Will, his come and his sweat, their scents combined.

Then, Hannibal begins to bite.

It starts softly, just a caress of teeth, softly, *softly,* holding the skin between his teeth. Then sharper, putting more pressure until he can feel the flesh pulse in his mouth with the rush of blood, how it begins to warm inside his mouth, until Will tenses with the beginning of pain. Then further, harder as Will releases a trembling sigh and leans his body closer towards Hannibal.

"There," Will gasps and Hannibal quickly forces himself to release him from his mouth.

"Good job, Hannibal," Will praises, extending one of his hands behind him to grab at Hannibal's waist, giving it a reassuring squeeze. Hannibal sags with a deep exhale, releasing the air that he has inadvertently trapped in his chest, and Will returns his hand to the kitchen counter. There's a part of Hannibal that is screaming at him that he should step back, put distance between them, and *stop right now* before this gets out of hand like last night. But then Will says: "Now the other side, darlin'," and that annoying little voice is shut down, silenced by Will's song and Hannibal presses his body closer, his mouth to the other shoulder blade with blind need.

Obediently, Hannibal does the same as before. He worries a soft patch of skin, soft increasing pressure little by little until he feels Will flinch under him. He continues until he has reached the same pressure as before, but Will doesn't say anything, he stays still on the counter, rolling his hips encouragingly one more time and Hannibal bites harder.

"Keep going," Will moans, taking deep breaths until he can't take it anymore. "There, stop."

Hannibal withdraws reluctantly, resting his forehead on the spot between his two new bites. He wraps his arms tightly around Will's body, realizing that he is shaking and making a wounded noise from deep inside his throat when Will rushes to calm him.

"Shh, darlin', it's alright," Will coos softly, uncomfortably twisting one of his arms to reach for Hannibal and running his fingers through the older man's hair. He can't move much between the counter in front of him and Hannibal's body behind, but he curves his back to touch the profiler as much as he possibly can. "We aren't stopping yet. You did so well, so

good," Will praises, caressing Hannibal's hair and slowly rolling his hips with small movements to remind Hannibal that he is still there. "You deserve a reward, darlin', next one you can bite anywhere you want."

Hannibal sighs against Will's body, struggling to get any words out at all. His own body is heavy, sagging forward and crushing Will against the counter, though the man doesn't seem inclined to complain about it, or about Hannibal's hard cock insistently pressed against his ass. Hannibal takes centering breaths but they're of very little help. Everything around him is Will, his scent, his warmth, his taste at the back of Hannibal's mouth. His ears are sweetly clogged to anything but Will's voice, his eyes blind to anything but Will's image in front of him.

Hazed and reticent, Hannibal lifts his head from where it rests at Will's nape. He trails his eyes in a near trance over Will's body, cataloging all his marks. There are two blooming bruises over the doctor's shoulder blades, a rabid pink with the indentations of Hannibal's teeth. Dried blood on the younger man's shoulder and the future scar under it. Will's neck is purple and red, and so are his thighs and his shoulders. And yet still, Hannibal's eyes latch on the blank space of Will's arms, almost glaring at it.

The patch of unmarred white skin feels almost blasphemous in its existence and something inside Hannibal breaks. Pushed by the dark current inside him and pulled by Will's song, Hannibal brings his open mouth to the back of Will's arm, lips pulled back and teeth flashing, latching onto the meat in one firm bite.

Will's inhale is sharp and startled, but he doesn't move, doesn't make a sound more than that as Hannibal sinks his teeth into him. The muscle flinches on his mouth, the soft flesh turning firm as Hannibal bites harder, hearing the sting of his canines on Will's breath.

Will lasts longer with every new bite, and Hannibal feels more shaken out from his edge. Something is growing, impossible to ignore. Something is coming, echoing through the hallways of Hannibal's mind palace. There's a rattle of keys somewhere, knuckles knocking on walls searching for a secret door.

Will's muscles clench inside Hannibal's mouth, and he is shaking in Hannibal's arms, his breath is rushed and labored, and Hannibal releases the pressure of his teeth without pulling away.

"I didn't tell you to stop," Will croaks with his voice rough at the edges, releasing a deep sigh. Hannibal ignores him, occupying his mouth on kissing the center of his bite where the suction of his mouth will bring a stark purple mark. He traces with his tongue the indentation of his teeth on Will's arm before the muscle returns to its usual shape. Hannibal can almost swear he can feel Will's blood rushing under his tongue.

Hannibal wants to bite more, his teeth are aching like they want to fall off, but he can't bring himself to form a single word. His mouth is not made to speak, but to eat.

He is lucky, though, that just thinking about something in Will's presence is enough for Will to make it come true. A monkey's paw wish.

“Again, anywhere, just… just bite, Hannibal,” Will begs – more likely, *demands* – fingers clenched on the rim of the kitchen counter, shaking like a leaf in Hannibal’s arms. He is just as affected as Hannibal is, voice hoarse and broken, knuckles white with pressure. His cock is forced down, pressed against the counter without space to move upwards but undeniably hard. Will smearing precum all over the wooden door of his counter, sparkly threads hanging from the leaking tip and pooling on the floor.

Hannibal is not in a better state. His cock is pulsing with need, trapped inside his slacks and painfully ignored. Hannibal is mildly aware of the growing wetness of his underwear that is dampening his slacks but barely cares about it. All his attention is on Will and those outrageous spots of skin that remain clean of his teeth.

Will is affected by Hannibal's actions, that's an undeniable truth, but Hannibal doesn't think he is even half as affected as Hannibal is. Will is shivering with need, but Hannibal is shaking and his need is so terribly heavy on his shoulders that he falls to his knees with a loud *thud.*

Hannibal doesn't utter a word, he has Will's permission and equal desire so he just goes straight to bite. He fits his mouth on a meaty piece of lower back, just over Will's tailbone and near his hips, biting with no regard for Will's pain. Hannibal doesn't start slowly, he sinks his teeth and latches into it, making Will jerk with a startled sound.

“I was hoping you’ll bite somewhere else,” Will jokes with another lewd roll of his hips, pushing his body back towards Hannibal, begging the older man to bite harder. He is constantly weaponizing his desire, pocking at Hannibal’s monster to come out.

Well. It was damn time for him to get what he wants.

Hannibal takes a deep breath, slowly releasing the pressure of his teeth on Will’s lower back. He drags his hands up the doctor’s naked thighs, carefully mapping the strong muscles and the coarse hair. He cups the doctor’s ass with his hands, testing the give of the soft flesh with a squeeze before going for the bite without warning.

Will jerks, slapping a hand against the counter loudly. Hannibal sucks a bruise on the meat of his asscheek, a stern reprimand for the bratty behavior without regard for his previous attempts to not reveal his deviations. Like serial killers with sexual inclinations, bruising a mark at the center of his mouth on the victim’s skin, and, unlike victims, Will shivers under Hannibal’s mouth, and the doctor’s skin bristles with goosebumps.

Hannibal releases the flesh with a deep, satisfied sigh. His eyelids are heavy, but pleasure is drumming through him freely. His cock is trapped inside his slack but pulsing, almost beating like a second heart. He opens his mouth wide, one of his hands cupping Will’s asscheek, the other resting on the younger man’s thigh as he flattens his tongue on the indentation of his teeth, trailing along the length of the sinuous curve.

Desire and pleasure are spiking to levels that Hannibal has never experienced before, pushing him towards a climax without providing his cock with any attention. His mind has shut down and he moves blindly, letting his urges and desires take control of his actions. He reels back slightly still feeling every part of his body aflame, every inch of skin electrified, his fingertips

burning as he grabs Will's cheeks and pushes them apart, revealing the raw pink puckered hole, pulsing just like Hannibal's cock, the muscle gaping lightly, inviting and welcoming.

Hannibal knows in hindsight that many things can feel incredibly good, even if he has no experience in them. He wishes he had experience in them, just to make them more pleasant for Will, but as it is, the better way to get experience is by experimenting. He leans forward, thumbs resting on the underside of Will's cheeks, and he places a kiss over the ring of muscle.

Will shivers again with a surprised gasp, and Hannibal echoes a moan, pressing it against the doctor's hole. Being buried in Will's, no matter which part of him is the one to be buried, is the most sinful and pleasant experience of Hannibal's life, more erotic and indecent than anything, and perhaps even more enjoyable than sex had been. Hannibal takes out his tongue, licking and tasting, tracing every wrinkle of Will's hole, slipping the wet muscle inside and moaning around his mouthful. He feels Will trembling as he pushes deeper inside, and he thinks that there's nothing that will ever be as rewarding and perfect as it is to have Will in his hands trembling with pleasure and coming undone only by Hannibal's tongue.

But still, even if Hannibal would love to spend every single second of his life from now forward, Will is a hungry beast much more used to the indulgences of the flesh, and there is so much he will tolerate.

"Fuck," Will curses, and turns around with a violently sudden movement. "You're driving me insane, darlin'," Will hisses with a hoarse voice. His usually sharp eyes are drunk with lust, the blue of his eyes is nothing but a thin line of lust around the swollen pupil, and his face is contorted into something feral, with deep crimson cheeks and wild hair, with his teeth peeking dangerously from his snarl. His cock is flushed just like his face and his chest, dripping wet and curved up towards his stomach. The evidence of Hannibal's hunger is all over him, in the color of his skin and the bruises and the way Hannibal's bites seem to shine in a darker red.

Will places both of his hands on Hannibal's shoulders, forcing his weight onto the profiler and Hannibal's knees ache from the pressure against the unforgiving floor though he barely registers it, like a phantom ache that doesn't belong to him. His mind feels disconnected from his body, and his eyes follow Will's hand as he redirects it to wrap thin fingers around his hard cock.

"Be nice," Will tells him, slipping the fingers from his free hand onto Hannibal's hair and gripping a good amount on his fist. He takes a deep breath as he directs his cock to poke at Hannibal's parted lips, and Hannibal doesn't even hesitate to open his mouth, letting his jaw drop to welcome Will inside. "Be nice," Will repeats as he slips his cock slowly inside with a shaking hand and an equally shaking voice as he keeps his eyes fixated on Hannibal's. "Be nice, and if you're very *very* careful with your teeth, you can use them a little."

That's all it takes for the last thread of thought to finally abandon Hannibal's mind. He closes his eyes and swallows Will's cock all the way down, all that he can take. His throat opens for Will, or Will just has that power over him, making himself push and open his path inside Hannibal in a way that is so kind that Hannibal cannot even wish to resist it. He hollows his

cheeks around Will's length and sucks, letting Will set the rhythm for a couple of thrusts that have both of them shaking.

Hannibal can't make a sound, but Will can't contain the sounds that are sucked from him, loud *ah, ah, ah's* as his fist clenches on Hannibal's hair and his body starts spasming. There's another thrust, deep inside Hannibal's throat and forcing Hannibal's nose into the coarse pubic hair that brings reflective tears to his eyes and cuts down his breathing.

Hannibal has his lips wrapped tight around the base of Will's cock, and then he fits his teeth, grazing lightly at the hard flesh with them, and then pulling back, running them along Will's cock delicately enough not to infringe pain, but with enough pressure to make Will feel the threat of them.

With a stutter moan that gets caught in his ribcage Will tenses and all his muscles lock in place. He starts coming suddenly, with thick threads of come that fill Hannibal's mouth and slide down his abused throat, and a deep, satisfied sigh that echoes around the kitchen.

Hannibal sucks lazily around Will's cock, teeth softly catching on Will's skin. He sucks around the head for the last traces of come that still cling to it, and when he raises his gaze towards the younger man, he finds Will with his mouth partially open, looking adoringly at him. The overstimulation must be killing him with every new drag of Hannibal's tongue over his spent cock, and yet still, Will bears Hannibal's attention with only some twitches of his face and an intermittent tremor of his body, but always with the same adoration in his eyes.

"Enjoying yourself, darlin'?" Will asks sweetly, stroking at Hannibal's hair with his clean hand, the other holding onto the counter behind him.

Hannibal nods absently, returning to his body in slow increments, realizing with surprise that his cock is no longer hard and the wet spot at the front of his slacks has grown with spilled semen. Hannibal releases a shivering sigh as he reels back with another nod, and Will's cock flops down between his legs, gleaming with Hannibal's spit.

It takes Will perhaps only a second before he sighs with relief at being released from Hannibal's hot mouth, and then another small wounded sound follows. Will looks relieved, but as it is, he also looks displeased from the lack of wet warmth. He deflates and he falls slowly to his knees in front of Hannibal, just as tired as Hannibal is but still smiling with adoring eyes. Will sighs again, cupping Hannibal's cheeks as he leans forward to place a peck on the profiler's mouth and rests his forehead against Hannibal's.

There's a few seconds of silence, disturbed only by the sound of their disjointed breathing, and then Hannibal blurts out: "Let me draw you a bath."

"If that's what you want, of course," Will agrees easily, kissing Hannibal's cheek. "Anything that you want."

He looks slightly startled, but Hannibal feels even more unmoored, realizing that his desires have just spilled from his mouth without his conscious mind having thought of it before, but knowing deeply how much he wants it.

“In a moment,” Hannibal says. He tries to make sense of what just happened, and tentatively puts his hands on Will’s body, tracing his marks just because he can and he wants to. It’s an incredibly novel feeling, to just take and ask without restraint, knowing that he *can* have what he wants.

It’s novel, and it’s incredibly, awfully dangerous and it feels so *good.*

Something, something lurks in the corners of Hannibal’s mind palace. The echo of steps. A soft knocking on the walls. Something is shifting into place, like the gentle click of a key turning in a lock. The swift sound of someone pulling at the protective covers over furniture. The song of air that comes from a recently open window, blowing away the thick layers of sticky dust.

“How far would you have let me bite?” Hannibal asks, slowly raising his eyes to meet Will’s. He finds that sharp, twisted grin pulling at the corners of the doctor’s mouth, and the adoration in his eyes is monstrous, burning holes in Hannibal’s sense of self.

“As far as you’d wanted,” Will confesses proudly, and Hannibal doesn't doubt the truth in his words.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is on Thursday! We are getting close to the ending 🥺 thank you all for the immense support 🥺

Oh no, I'm falling in love

Chapter Notes

> Look, I know that this is shorter than usual updates, but I think that after 15k of porn released in two days, I'm allowed to have a break... SIKE, next chapter tomorrow.

For Will, life before Hannibal has been dull. Boring perhaps if he felt inclined to be kinder to the men that had occupied his mind before.

Garret Jacob Hobbs is the latest one that has been clawing at Will's empathy, and that Will refuses to let completely get inside his mind. He doesn't need the man's love for Abigail permeating his sense of self. It will only make things more difficult.

For now, Will needs to see Abigail as an instrument for greater things. In the future, if Will needs to see her as his and Hannibal's child, he will simply pluck that from Hannibal's mind.

Before Garret Jacob Hobbs, the one crying to be let in was Matthew Brown. Who was actually quite a simple man. Sadistic and lonely, looking for someone that could see him, and trying to find it in Will. He was the easiest man to manipulate that Will has ever found.

Will's book has a few chapters about Matthew's neuroses, and a full one about how Jack Crawford's belief that Will was a cold-hearted killer put Will at the other end of Matthew Brown's gun.

Jack was right, obviously, but the book omits that bit of information just as it omits the months of manipulation Matthew endured from Will under his care.

Before Matthew, it was Tobias Budge, *The Maestro,* who was the most dangerous of the batch, and that his death at Will's hands put Will under Jack's vigilant eyes.

Before that, it was Randall Tier, who was the most interesting one, and Will had actually felt slightly endeared to, but it may be because of his feral nature. Will even visited him a few times at the museum. A shame that Will had to sell him to the FBI, but that's how life is. Randall should have done better to avoid being detected, but that's how serial killers are. They always want to be seen.

Before that, there were many more that Will can't bother to recall their names. He has killed serial killers and criminals since college, always hidden behind the killer du jour's mask. The FBI had always been incredibly useless, and so The Copy-Cat was born.

Will never liked the moniker that Freddie coined, and against what she says, it's not fitting. He doesn't copy other killers. Will takes… *inspiration,* like professional painters take

inspiration from that bothersome damp stain on the wall of the bathroom, allowing their imagination to turn it into something better.

But Will is grateful for them. They had given him their neuroses and made him uncatchable. No traceable motive, no evidence, no relationship with the victims. None of the usual serial killer's mistakes.

The Copy-Cat is a ghost, and Will's life is boring, and for the longest time, he has been content with the boring life.

And then, Hannibal Lecter appeared.

Now Will wants to be seen like the common killer wants. He wants the thrill of watching someone solve the puzzle he brought to death.

Will wants to show himself but he also doesn't want to get caught, so, a compromise perhaps.

Serial killers evolve all the time, it's expected. The Copy-Cat has never evolved. Maybe is time for him to. Will has always used other killers' MO, perhaps, it's time for him to not use another killer.

(Not yet to develop an MO for himself. He is not *that* stupid.)

Abigail behaved very nicely redirecting the FBI towards Nicholas Boyle, and Will firmly believes that well-behaved pets deserve rewards. And Hannibal could use a push in the right direction.

And so he is here, and the light of the Hobbs kitchen flickers when Will turns it on.

Freddie told him that Boyle begged for her help, that he wasn't the one who killed Marissa. Is a matter of time until guilt pushes the boy to desperation, right into the monster's hands.

The front door creaks as it gets open after long hours of waiting, and steps echo from the living room. A young man's voice follows.

"Abigail? Are you here?"

It only took one single text for Boyle to step into Will's trap. *'I know you didn't do it. Meet me at home.'* People are so predictable. *So, fucking, easy.*

Will closes his eyes as he leans against the far wall. He thinks of Abigail. He thinks of the fear trapped inside her and the anger and the impotence. How would she kill? Would she hide the body? How good would she be at it?

The plastic suit makes a noise when Will moves. He tenses, drifting into Abigail's mindset. *Terrified.* She would kill for the first time alone. *Angry.* She would let it all out. *Furious.* Let it go out on the only one she can do it. She would stab Nicholas Boyle until he was nothing but grounded meat.

“Is Abigail here?” Nicholas Boyle asks from the kitchen door, freezing when Will’s doe-like eyes fall onto him.

“Only figuratively,” Will smiles that small, dissatisfied smile Abigail makes.

“I should go,” Nicholas Boyle says. His voice wavers and he grows paler as the situation dawns on him. He tries to rush himself away, clumsily tripping onto himself when he takes on Will’s plastic suit and the hunting knife next to him on the counter.

“Sure, run,” Will tells him, half-returning to himself. He turns off the kitchen light and leaves the house in the shadows. “I love a good hunt.”

[x]

Nicholas Boyle lays on the floor of Abigail’s living room, gutted and, of course, dead.

Abigail would have wanted to eat him like her father taught her, but she has neither the experience, nor the time, nor the resources to do it on her own. And realizing what she did, a crisis would be more than expected. A clumsy but resourceful burial in the woods behind her house seems fitting of a killer her age.

Setting the scene is sometimes even more fun than the actual kill. Will actually likes getting the stage ready for the show. It’s good for anger issues, in the way going to demolition places to be given a hammer and encouraged to break cheap china and paper-thin walls is. Will gets to break a door, throw things around, break a lamp, and have fun swinging a bloody knife around the Hobbs' living room. He is quite proud of the blood-covered floor and walls and the pieces of Boyle’s hair that he left in the kitchen. It’s been a taxing few hours and his phone rings just as he is about to start dragging Boyle’s body outside.

‘You really can't come? We had dinner and were about to start watching a movie with Abigail. She made me make popcorn.’

Will smiles, struggling to get one of his hands out of his yellow plastic suit to type back to Hannibal and their daughter.

‘I think it will be nice for both of you to bond together, have a girls' night, braid your hair, talk about boys. You both really could use each other. We can take her somewhere nice next week.’

‘The museum perhaps? I heard that there is a new exhibition.’

‘Damn, you’re boring. Good thing you’re cute. We’re taking her shopping to the mall.’

Will almost can hear the irritated huff that Hannibal makes, and the subsequent endeared look that nests in those maroon eyes.

‘Yes, dear.’

Well, enough flirting. Time for work. Will has a grave to dig and a daughter to incriminate.

[x]

Will waits an hour after he returns to his house. Thirty minutes more to be sure, and then he sends Lounds a text.

‘Hobbs' residence. Don’t tell the FBI I told you.’

The man who goes every day to check on the Hobbs' house will find the evidence of struggle and blood and alert the police in one hour. The police will alert the FBI and Lounds will be already there before they arrive, mingling with the evidence and contaminating the scene.

Plus, she’ll get a nice article to keep herself entertained.

And Hannibal and Abigail have an alibi.

Everybody wins.

[x]

All the evidence points to Abigail. But it also doesn't.

There's no weapon, but the idea of it. A hunting knife that cannot be found. There are no fingerprints or hair, but the angle of the stabs and the force behind them point to someone who knew how to use the knife, someone shorter and slightly weaker than Nicholas Boyle.

It should be considered self-defense, but then, the gore and the violence cannot allow it. Abigail didn't stop after one or two when she was safe. If she had made one or two, they could have ruled it as self-defense, even three if they counted her fear as a factor. But the gore and violence behind thirty-two stab wounds cannot allow it. Abigail didn’t stop when she was safe, she kneeled over the body and continued until Boyle was dead and then destroyed. And then she holed him and buried him in the forest.

Everything points to Abigail and it makes sense except it *doesn't.*

The pictures of Nicholas Boyle’s desecrated body lay on top of the desk that separates Jack from Hannibal. Jack stands in front of Hannibal with his signature frown and a stern, disappointed look while Hannibal sits trying to make sense of the world around him.

“As you may expect, Abigail is the prime suspect, and so are you,” Jack says after the minutes of silence Hannibal spent looking at the pictures. “I need you to stay here until we’re through with the crime scene. And I’ll have to ask for your gun and your badge.”

Hannibal nods absently, still unable to make sense of any of it. Abigail was with him all night at his apartment eating dinner. He took her back to the hospital at midnight.

Nicholas Boyle’s death is placed around 9 P.M. Plenty of time for Hannibal and Abigail to return from Minnesota after a kill.

“Can I make a call?” Hannibal asks, eyes still lost on the pictures, and Jack crosses his arms, ready to deny it. At some other point, Hannibal would have just taken it, but not now. He frowns and from his mouth comes his own voice, but is tinted with Will’s accent. “Just let me call my lawyer, or do I have to read you my own rights?”

Jack looks like he is about to play bad-cop on him. His eyes and jaw are settled in stone, but he finally relents even if he doesn’t move from where he stands. “Go ahead,” he says, not giving Hannibal privacy for the call.

Hannibal should call his lawyer. He is aware that is the correct thing to do. The thing he *should* do. But as his fingers hover over the number, Hannibal changes his mind.

Not the correct thing to do or the thing he should do, but the thing he *wants* to do.

Will is such a terrible, terrible influence.

“Hello, darlin’,” Will’s voice drawls purposely from the other side and Hannibal cannot fight the way warmth spreads through him at hearing the doctor’s voice.

Jack still stands in front of him, so Hannibal forces the glee out of his voice and decides to give as little information as possible, and not let Jack become aware of who’s on the other side of the call.

“Nicholas Boyle has been found dead, and I’m a suspect,” Hannibal summarizes in the flattest tone he can. “I’m at Quantico, Jack is asking for my badge.”

Hannibal can picture, just by the silence, the way Will shifts from playful to dangerous, how he is glaring daggers at the wall just because he can’t throw real ones at Jack. Hannibal forces away the smile that is trying to worm onto his lips, but there’s nothing he can’t do to calm his own gleeful heart.

“Wait for me,” Will says simply and hangs up without another word.

Hannibal sits there peacefully pleased, gun in his belt and badge in his pocket, knowing that he doesn’t need to explain anything to Jack Crawford for the time being and that he doesn’t need to explain himself to Will. He will come no matter what.

And come Will does.

Hannibal sees him entering the building through the glass walls of Jack's office.

Will looks *furious.* Sharp eyes focused on Jack's throat from the other side of the hall. He looks like he is about to tear Jack's heart from the man's chest if he is given the slightest chance and as if he is going to set the building on fire if he doesn't get to do it. He looks like an army of one single man going into battle, decided to win.

Freddie Lounds is at his left, camera hanging from her throat and wearing a fox-like hungry grin. Will's lawyer is at his right, a young woman with impeccable clothes and long dark hair framing her stone-like face as she walks through Quantico like a shark following a trail of blood.

Jack turns green the moment he sees them coming, and Hannibal doesn't try to control the sense of satisfaction that curses through him or the pleased smile on his lips.

Will opens the door of the office with a grin, strutting inside like he owns it. He doesn't even bother to acknowledge Jack before he crosses the beige carpet cupping Hannibal's cheeks and meets the profiler with a kiss.

"Hello, my love," Will greets him with a proud purr, stroking Hannibal's cheeks, and Hannibal just looks at him with wide eyes, utterly speechless.

A moment in which he feels incredibly cherished passes with another peck to his lips, and Will turns away to face Jack, his smile disappearing and redirecting the sharpness of it to his eyes.

Yet still, somehow, it doesn't make Hannibal feel less loved.

[x]

Hannibal thought it would take them hours of fighting Jack before they could leave Quantico, but knowing what he knows about Will, he shouldn't be surprised to find himself sitting in Will's car after only twenty-three minutes.

"Do you want me to drop you at your house, or do you wanna go somewhere else, darlin'?" Will asks kindly, his hand resting over Hannibal's knee.

Hannibal's car, after all, is considered evidence for as long as the investigation continues. He dreads the idea of someone having to chauffeur him around, but also he thinks he has nowhere to be apart from work. He thinks of Will's house, full of life, so different to his own where he is alone, starving for contact and connection, always pinning for Will. He thinks of Will's promises of a next time, Will's soft and warm body writhing under him, pink with pleasure, and the decision is made.

“Would it be a bother to ask to join you tonight at your house?” Hannibal tries cautiously. He is not shy, and even if he knows Will won’t mind, he tries to be respectful. Take it one step at a time.

Will, clearly, doesn’t have the same reservations.

“Move in with me,” Will says, leaping and jumping blindly and happily into a cliff.

Hannibal’s eyes go widely round, startled by the sudden offer. At any other point, the honesty with which Will speaks would have startled a laugh out of him, or the rise of a brow. But right now, something inside him (Will’s influence probably) brings a voice to the back of his head that asks *Is it really that bad to indulge in something you both want?”*

Honestly? No. It is not.

“Yes,” Hannibal answers, and watches as Will’s smug grin morphs into an adoring smile and the sharpness of his eyes softens with love.

Love.

What a novel feeling to finally be the one being caressed by the warmth of it. To finally be loved and allow the cold snow of loneliness to thawn under Will’s light.

Winter is finally releasing Hannibal from its cruel claws, and Hannibal has never felt better.

“You sure? 7 dogs is a commitment,” Will jokes, even if he is already turning the car on.

Hannibal huffs fondly as he fastens his seatbelt, making himself comfortable in Will’s life.

“Take me home, Will.”

Oh no, I'm loved.

Chapter Notes

It was due to happen at some point.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The time spent with Will is the most joyful of Hannibal's life. He hasn't properly moved in yet, but Will is already designing preparations for their future with all the excitement one would think he'll have in bringing another dog. He is planning to remodel the kitchen, build a kennel, and make an extra room for Abigail. Will also mentioned something about buying a house together, a bigger one in the future. One with enough space for all of their conjoined family. He just mentioned it in passing as they walked the doors, like it could be another simple thing in his precious mind like changing the bedsheets, and not something that left Hannibal frozen and breathless and speechless in some spot of Will's land.

He is making plans for *their* future together because even knowing what Hannibal is and what he is capable of, Will still wants him in his life. Because, even against everything that life has taught Hannibal of how unworthy he is of love, Will, somehow, still loves him.

Will loves him. Hannibal is loved.

The very first days they didn't do much more than to get lost in each other and share every second.

But the days continue, as well as the investigation of The Copy-Cat and the death of Nicholas Boyle. Hannibal is not allowed to intervene, and Will has no interest in working with the FBI now that it takes him away from Hannibal instead of bringing them closer.

Hannibal is not as easily dismayed. The case is still in the back of his skull, no matter how much Will tries to kiss it away. Will had relented in the end with a deep sigh, lending Hannibal his study for him to work in private, and then Hannibal had spent another hour kissing Will before going to work.

So, now, Hannibal stands there in Will's study on the upper floor. A small bedroom that has been refurnished into some type of study. He is here seemingly to work, but he doesn't get much done.

He is at Will's study *alone,* a part of Will's house he had never seen before. Will has opened the doors of his house to Hannibal, and this is another coveted space he gets to explore without Will's scrutinizing eyes.

Hannibal wants everything from Will, to know as much of Will as Will knows of him. It's exciting to be able to touch Will's things, learn of him through the choices of décor and the

books he treasures, and the lures he makes.

There's a wall covered from floor to ceiling with shelves full of hand-made lures and that's the thing that calls for Hannibal first. Hannibal eyes it curiously, the fruits of Will's labor are in front of him, and his heart swells in his chest with adoration. They're pieces of Will's soul, and he wants to touch them, ask why he has saved them instead of using them, why is that he loves them so much to have kept them here.

Hannibal takes one of them with careful fingers, gently as if he were holding Will's hand. The lure has dark feathers and a piece of small bone that looks like it has come from a considerably large animal – perhaps one that Will hunted, or his dogs had killed, or he had found dead in the woods during one of his walks.

There's another with a piece tooth that Hannibal assumes is a wisdom tooth as the centerpiece. Then another made with pieces of Wolf Trap, barks of wood and dog hair, and even smaller pieces of a broken bone.

All the lures are decorative and beautiful, but there's one that catches Hannibal's eyes. It lays further up, on one of the highest shelves. The centerpiece of it is a lock of dark, curly hair weaved into it.

Hannibal takes that one with the utmost respect and care, with his pulse fluttering in his throat, nearly audible just under his skin. The hair looks like Will's, but slightly thicker. Hannibal wonders when Will cut his hair and made this one. Days, weeks, months, perhaps even years ago.

Hannibal holds the lure in his hand with deep adoration and risks a glance at the door before bringing it to his nose. He expects to smell his lover's scent, *pine and woods, and fresh rain,* but instead, he finds the smell of sickness and lilies. It's the smell of a woman's perfume and cancer and something that reminds Hannibal slightly of Jack Crawford's house.

Something dormant forces itself to life at the forefront of Hannibal's mind. A moment of revelation that brings back memories of a few years back before The Copy-Cat killed Bella Crawford before her cancer had the chance.

Hannibal studies the lock of hair more closely. It's thicker than Will's and darker. He places it on the desk and quickly returns to the first lure he saw to examine it again. He finds, unsurprisingly, that the bone of the centerpiece is not from a large animal but from an average human and he shudders as the realization creeps onto him. He takes another, the one with the tooth. It's not a wisdom tooth, but a human fang that Will doesn't have missing.

Extreme levels of cruelty require extreme levels of empathy.

A killer without a motive, with the ability to borrow any point of view and hide behind it. A killer with ties to the FBI and a strong knowledge of the FBI's inner workings.

Chances. Capability. Intelligence.

Uncatchable.

Randall Tier, a patient of Will Graham, snapping – no, guided through the darkness, encouraged, taught. A pup raised into a wolf.

Tobias Budge, *The Maestro,* a friend of one of Will Graham's patients. He was serenading The Copy-Cat killer, but he was never copied by the object of his admiration. He remained ignored, mocked by the lack of attention. He grew resentful of the object of his admiration and he ended up at Will Graham's office, where he and his friend ended up dead by the doctor's hand.

'I should have stopped after the Budge incident.'

Will Graham, incarcerated on the suspicion of being The Maestro or an accomplice. Freed by lack of evidence. Manipulating his way out with the help of Freddie Lounds.

No more ties to the FBI to learn about the killer du jour, but then befriended Freddie Lounds who can feed him first-hand information of new killers.

The Copy-Cat goes dormant for two whole years.

Then Matthew Brown, who was pushed in Will's direction by the circus that was the doctor's incarceration and trial. *'He wanted to be my friend.'* Matthew Brown, whose house was a shire to The Copy-Cat; whose life revolved around The Copy-Cat's crimes, bringing them back to life like a child trying to learn how to draw from copying the paintings of the great masters. Matthew Brown, dying at Will's hands in Will's office.

Will, declaring self-defense from a patient who was pushed into madness by Jack Crawford.

A lie.

Jack Crawford's accusations had stopped years before Matthew tried to kill Will.

The Copy-Cat, still asleep for another year, into solitude and retirement until Garret Jacob Hobbs – no. Until *Hannibal Lecter.*

The timeline fits. The profile fits.

Doctor Will Graham is The Copy-Cat.

Hannibal releases a self-deprecating chuckle. *Of course,* who else would have loved him, if not Will?

Life with Will had been the most joyful time of Hannibal's existence, but it couldn't last. Monsters like Hannibal don't deserve to be loved, won't ever be loved except by another monster.

[x]

Hannibal walks slowly down the stairs and the wood creaks beneath his weight. The dogs are lazing around in the living room, scattered on the floor around the chair in which Will is reading.

Winston is the first one to react, always quick to sense a threat to his master. He begins to growl the moment his eyes focus on Hannibal, and quickly takes an attack position as Hannibal raises his gun towards Will.

Will also raises his eyes, but he seems unbothered by the gun aimed at his head.

“I understand that BDSM requires the parts to have a conversation about consent before they engage in a kinky scene,” Will comments nonchalantly, returning his eyes to the book in his hands.

Will whistles a high-pitched sound that alerts the snoring dogs, and the pack sets into a defense squadron around him, while he puts his book away. Will takes off his glasses, putting them on the side table along with the book, and they have a cold sharpness in them that Hannibal hasn’t seen yet.

No. It's one that he has seen twice. Not in Will, but in his own reflection in the bathroom mirror as he washed blood from his hands.

The dogs are too many, and they won’t hesitate to attack, raised, and trained in the same fashion Randall Tier was. If Hannibal shoots, no matter if the wound is fatal and Will dies here, the dogs will be onto him the second the bullet gets out. If Hannibal shoots, he won’t leave this house alive.

It doesn’t matter anyway. If Hannibal makes his shoot, he would have rid the world of two monsters.

“Lower your gun, Hannibal,” Will says patiently. His tone is just as cold and cruel as his eyes, a direct order that makes Hannibal hesitate for a second, knowing that even with a gun in his hand and Will unarmed and sitting away from him, Hannibal is still the one who is at a disadvantage. Will gestures to the dogs around him as if Hannibal needed the reminder, and adds. “Don’t be a fool.”

“I was a fool when I trusted you,” Hannibal retorts, holding the gun tighter. He jerks his arms up to aim directly between Will’s eerie eyes, and Will clicks his tongue, getting the dogs to stay still. The sound is the same as he uses for Hannibal, and for a terrifying moment, Hannibal’s eyes focus on Will’s.

Hannibal realizes, in that very flicker of a moment, how deeply Will’s manipulations have settled on him.

Will’s eyes soften slightly, but not in the way they always soften when he looks at Hannibal. Will still has a bullet with his name on it, and years of evading capture aren’t easily forgotten. Will's eyes don't soften, but the skin around them, the lines in the corners, and the line of his lips, do.

“My love for you is real, Hannibal,” Will tells him, standing from the armchair, but jerking to a stop when the click of the safety of Hannibal’s gun is dislodged.

“You are The Copy-Cat,” Hannibal accuses with a betrayed sneer and watches how Will clasps his hands in front of himself, adopting a submissive position. He doesn’t want to fight, but he will if he needs to. And he will win if Hannibal hesitates.

It’s not a question, clearly, Hannibal *knows,* but Will answers it nonetheless.

“Yes.”

“You killed Nicholas Boyle,” Hannibal says, and Will frowns with distaste at the mention of the young man.

“My identity was stolen from me.”

“Why didn’t you kill Jack then?” Hannibal asks, unable to force himself to shoot. There is a monster in front of him, but there’s also the only meaningful connection he has, the only person who has shown him love since Mischa. He is also the same man who prepared the crime scene to frame Abigail, knowing that Hannibal would be dragged with her in the fall down. “He is the one that blamed Boyle.”

Will sends him an endeared look, and he curls a small smile on those beautiful lips that Hannibal won’t be able to kiss ever again.

“Because I’m saving Jack for you, darlin’,” Will tells him with a sweet tone, and Hannibal reels a step back with the shock of it.

“I’m not a killer,” he protests, but is weak. He *is* a killer. He has killed many people, not as many as Will, but enough to be stepping into the line of serial killer. He confessed it to Will, and the proud gleam in the doctor’s eyes makes sudden sense. All the manipulations that he didn’t even try to disguise, all the ways he pushed Hannibal into becoming and confessing to him the dark parts of himself.

Was this what he did to Randall Tier and Matthew Brown?

“Hannibal, darlin’, my love,” Will teases, with the same mockingly sweet tone from before. “It’s just us here, you don’t have to lie.”

“You’re the one who lied to me,” Hannibal refutes. His voice comes out venomous, and the comment makes Will’s expression turn sour, and the dangerous glint returns to his eyes accompanied by an edge of hurt.

“I *never* lied to you. Omissions, yes, sure, but I never lied, not to you.”

Hannibal realizes that his hands are shaking slightly. It’s not common for him, his shoots have always been millimetrically accurate. But it’s a common, recurring occurrence when Will is involved.

Will also notices this, the way Hannibal is faltering in his stance, how doubt starts to worm inside his heart, and how the floor starts dissolving under his feet. Will's eyes soften again, and his whole demeanor follows. He sighs, releasing the fight from his chest, and his shoulders drop down, back to being the sweet, caring lover he conditioned Hannibal to believe he is. That Will *is,* apart from the part he is a serial killer.

"I never lied to you Hannibal," Will says, taking a tentative step forward, then another when Hannibal doesn't show any sign of stopping him. "I love you. I love the man that clings to me in bed and I love the darkness that you try so desperately to hide inside you. I meant every word."

"You don't love me, you love what you trying to make me." Hannibal's voice breaks as the words come out, and even if he doesn't lower his gun he is not shooting. He is letting Will shorten the space between them. The sting of tears is prickling behind his eyes, bothersome and burning, distorting his vision and obscuring his aim.

"No one can be fully aware of another human being unless we love them, Hannibal," Will says with a flat tone but tender eyes. Will's love is always stored in his eyes, that is where it manifests, that's how he loves, with the part of him that most damage can cause. "By that love, we see potential in our beloved. Through that love, we allow our beloved to see their potential. Expressing that love, our beloved's potential comes true," Will crosses the space between them, but remains a careful distance away. His words are slow and measured, just like has always spoken in their sessions, when Hannibal needed him most to be a guiding presence. "I see you, Hannibal, and I love you because of everything that you are."

"You don't love," Hannibal cries, feeling the warm tears spill through the corners of his eyes and from the front, completely overflowing his eyes. His aim is faltering, his arms are heavy and he slowly begins to drop his stance, his gun slowly losing the aim from Will's head to Will's chest. He still could shoot, he still could kill Will like this. "You can't love me."

"I can. I do," Will says, taking another step forward, close enough that the cold barrel of Hannibal's gun collides with his chest, but he doesn't try to grab Hannibal's gun, doesn't try to put himself away from the imminent shot. Will's expression doesn't falter, he is tender and stern at the same time. And kind, always so kind. "If not me Hannibal, then who?"

"You put Abigail in danger," Hannibal forces through the tears, as a last attempt to resist the force that is Will Graham.

"Garret Jacob Hobbs put Abigail in danger, she has always been in danger," Will deadpans. "You're smarter than that Hannibal, you know the evidence isn't damming. If I wanted a scapegoat, I would have left evidence on Nicholas Boyle, but I gave you and Abigail an alibi, I went to take you away from Jack, and you *know it,* just as you know the world will eat Abigail alive without us."

Hannibal's reproach dies on his lips, and the only thing that comes out is a painful sob. He has so many things to say, but every each and one of them is another lie that Will will disarm in front of him.

“Oh, darlin’,” Will sighs, reaching to cup Hannibal’s cheeks and brushing the tears away with his thumbs, ignoring altogether the gun that still remains pressed to his chest. “Stop clinging to a moral compass that you don’t possess, and give me all the beautiful and the ugly things of you, and let me love them equally.”

His voice is sweet, always so sweet. His touch is the kind of touch Hannibal has been starved for and chases with his face, nuzzling at Will’s palm. “Hannibal, please, look at me,” Will begs, and Hannibal slowly opens his hazed eyes, meeting those sharp but loving blue eyes as Will strokes this cheek. “I’ll do anything to protect us. I want you, and I love you. We can be a family.”

The truth of that statement is undeniable. Will knows it, and so does Hannibal.

“You want to make me a killer,” Hannibal protests one last time, weak even to his ears. He is already a killer, he was even before Will. He is a monster and has always been a monster. Monsters can’t love, and monsters can’t be loved.

This is fake. This is manipulation. And this, whatever twisted, monstrous version of love that this is, will finally break Hannibal, and all the effort, pain, and starvation he went through in life will have been in vain.

“No,” Will tells him. “I want you to be free of these chains that you cling to. You’re not evil, and you’re not a monster. You are so good, Hannibal, *so good,* made even more so by the darkness that inhabits you. You have refused yourself every pleasure, every good thing in life for fear of feeding that darkness. It’s selflessness that has cost you your life,” Will tells him, holding Hannibal’s face in his hands, holding Hannibal’s eyes with his gaze, holding Hannibal’s tears at bay just with one look. Holding Hannibal upright, just by the song of his voice. “You don’t need to be a martyr, Hannibal, you just need to be you. Let yourself go.”

A beast cries. A child gets found. A teenager is held. A man is loved.

Hannibal feels a monstrous ache inside him and for the first time, for the first time in his life, instead of ignoring it, he embraces it. And he let’s go.

Hannibal finally collapses with a painful cry, dropping his head on Will’s shoulder. Wil quickly takes hold of his gun and secures it away from Hannibal’s grasp, and in turn, he hugs Hannibal and helps the profiler hold onto him, pressing their bodies close.

“Shh, shh, darlin’,” Will coos, tightening his hold on Hannibal. “I have, and I love you, everything is going to be alright.”

[x]

The dinner, for the first time in Hannibal’s life, is meat. The kind that is a dark pink, and it bleeds a dark red.

The table is set for them both, with a piece of roasted pig on each plate. More than Hannibal usually allows himself to eat.

Hannibal watched as Will cooked, watched as Will set the table, and never said a word against it.

Now he sits at the table, knowing who Will is, studying every previous interaction between them, and wonders how is that he didn't see it coming; and more importantly, how he, with all his knowledge and intrusion of Will, could never have entirely predicted it. He should have known, should have expected it. Their relationship could not end in any other way except exactly this way.

"Jack won't stop," Hannibal says suddenly, startling himself and only managing to get a raised brow from Will. His voice is hoarse, from the tears and the time he has spent silent after their confrontation. Hannibal takes a deep breath, and the next words come with his normal cadence, more measured. "He won't stop, he eventually will discover it."

"I'm very careful," Will says, spearing a piece of meat. "Jack doesn't want to catch The Copy-Cat anyway, he wants him to vanish."

"Not The Copy-Cat," Hannibal says with a slow shake of his head. "Abigail. Jack won't stop trying to get her."

"No. But we promised to protect her, and we will."

Hannibal studies those words as he takes hold of his knife and fork, but doesn't start eating yet. "That was your plan all along," he says, not as accusatory as he would like. "For me to see Abigail as our child, for me to end up killing Jack to protect her."

"Not you, us," Will says, then adds a small shrug as he continues, "But, I thought it may be cathartic for you. Finally be able to protect your charge."

Hannibal utters a disbelieving, ironic chuckle. Will's cruelty knows no limits. Nor does it his manipulations or his love.

"Good for my therapy, doctor?" Hannibal asks, lowering his eyes to his plate, still unable to stab his own meat.

The air changes around them. There's a gravitational pull coming from where Will sits – like a black hole, or an imploding star, the moment just before a supernova gets born. That's Hannibal's clue that Will is smiling.

"I gave you the family you wanted Hannibal," Will says softly as he cuts his dinner. The light catches on his knife, and it reflects it back to Hannibal's eyes, catching the man's gaze and forcing him to watch the way Will tears the meet apart from the bone. "I'm giving you the chance to redeem yourself and do the things you wished you had done. To close that wound you still carry."

Will pauses for a moment. He doesn't click his tongue. Will waits, and after a minute, Hannibal raises his eyes to meet his. Then, Will resumes: "When the moment comes, it is for you to decide if you want to accept my gift or not."

Hannibal nods. He thinks of the man who killed Mischa, and remembers the pleasant crack of the skull when it crashed against the floor, and how the reverberation of it traveled up his arms. He thinks of the satisfaction and the beauty of the aftermath. He thinks of the beauty of the color of the blood in his hands.

He could ask Will what would he do if Hannibal decided to turn on him, if after everything he decided to reject his love. But also, Hannibal doesn't need to ask to know the answer. The day he kissed Will, he realized what he would do if Will were to reject him. Will is his mate, his only equal in this world, the only one person in the world he can understand his love and love him. He is the man who loves him back in the exact same way Hannibal loves him.

Hannibal will kill him if Will ever leaves him. It's perfectly safe to conjecture that Will would do the same.

"I will," Hannibal says, meeting Will's pleased eyes for a moment before he turns them back down and tears a piece of meat.

Hannibal takes his first bite of the night, the first bite of meat in his life after Mischa. The taste is similar, but it's not exactly the same. This is pig, and there's something lacking.

It brings memories back, but not the pain, just the dissatisfaction.

"We are designed to want more, to strive consistently," Will comments absently, because his eyes are sharp and unforgiving. Because thinking of something in Will's presence, no matter how small, no matter how dark, is to make a wish and see it come true. "We are never truly content. It's not in our nature."

Be seen. Be loved. Be transformed.

Chapter End Notes

I'll be honest with all of you, I always struggle so much with ending long fics, so I hope this chapter is not so terribly awful. I struggle a lot with maintaining the quality, so, if you have any constructive and respectful criticism, is always welcomed.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

I'm so *very* sorry for the late update, but I needed to take a break from Hannibal. I struggle a lot with writing endings for long fics, and this was pure stress. But it's finally here, and I hope you like it and it gives you the closure this fic needs.

I still have many comments to answer from this fic, and I will just give me a little more time. I want to take all the people who took the time to read and leave comments as I was uploading this and later as it was on hiatus. Thank you for being so kind and patient with me, your comments and support mean the world to me.

As always, thank you for reading.

Here's the ending:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal's mind palace is vast. It is built on the foundations of Castle Lecter with the added rooms from many places from Hannibal's life. There are many, many rooms. Most of them unused and unlived in, coated with a thick layer of dust.

Hannibal doesn't wander through his mind palace. The floorboards are treacherous, filled with holes and traps. He, instead, had decided to abandon the rest of it to the cruel nature of the mind and keep himself hidden in the pantry where it is crumpled and dark, but safe.

He had expected to die there alone in the damp darkness, but then Will irrupted in his mind palace like it belonged to him, kicking doors open, stumbling over every memory of Hannibal, searching for him.

And after long months of searching, Will found him.

He stands in front of the open door of the pantry, looking down at a little boy, no more than 12 years old, scrawny and dirty, scared and hungry. A bag of skin full of bones more than a child.

"Hello darlin'," Will coos sweetly, offering his hand. "Do you want to get out?"

Hannibal nods slowly, far less scared and hesitant than he was when he was not alone and those men found him. He stands up from the dirty floor with Will's help and stretches his numb legs after so many years of hiding, listening to the satisfactory crack of his bones and delighting in the painful stretch of his muscles. His limbs grow heavy and strength returns to him as he grows from a child into a man, barely able to fit through the pantry door without having to duck his head.

The kitchen's clock is forever stuck at 9:07 P.M. and Hannibal spares it a last look before he starts to walk.

They walk together towards the hall, hand in hand, uncovering the furniture from its ghastly white sheets. The mirrors they pass reflect dark skin corroded by the cold, and bony antlers that grow with each passing second.

The walls shake and the floorboards crackle. The castle shifts and, under Hannibal's feet, the dancing skeleton of Palermo welcomes him to the chapel.

The phone rings thrice before Jack Crawford's voice echoes through the chapel, strained and distant.

"Hannibal."

"Hello, Jack," Hannibal's voice rumbles through the palace and everything else is silent. The chapel breathes in and holds it, and the silence wears a new cadence. "I know we didn't part on the best of terms," Hannibal resumes, his voice singing in this newfound cadence, one more suited to his true self, "But I always considered you as much of a friend as of a boss."

There's a relieved sigh from the other side of the line, and Jack mumbles: *"I'm happy to hear that."*

"I wanted to tell you that Will and I have decided to pursue a relationship together," he says without much ado, and in the silence they can hear the sharp intake of air that Jack takes with stark clarity. "And if our friendship hasn't been too broken, we would love to have you for dinner. After all, you're the one who introduced us together."

Jack huffs a chuckle, and Hannibal can picture the way Jack shakes his head and how it hangs between his shoulders with a defeated smile when the man gives them a softly spoken: *"I would like that, congratulations."*

Is half-forced, but as honest as it will get, as much honest joy Jack can feel for someone else finding the happiness that has been stolen from him.

"Tomorrow perhaps? You know Will's address, we'll wait for you."

The call ends after a wistful *'of course'* and the phone disappears from Hannibal's hand in this otherworldly realm where Will sits alongside him in the chapel. Sunlight bathes them from the windows of the mind, and the dust of Hannibal's past floats in the air with a golden tint. The palace releases a deep sigh while the walls creak with the weight. The mind palace is shifting, growing, and adapting to the new man Hannibal is becoming.

Will shifts at his side, and turns to look at Hannibal with an amused expression. "Did you just make a cannibal pun to the head of the Bureau?"

"Does it bother you?" Hannibal asks, tilting his head to look at Will from over his shoulder with a placid smile.

“I feel like it should,” Will says with a shrug, turning his eyes back to the altar before them. “You’re bold, and will grow bolder. That’s dangerous. That’s how serial killers are caught.”

“Allow a man his indulgences, Will. After all, you were the one that insisted I should embrace them,” Hannibal comments with a small, almost invisible smile. He crosses one leg over the other and clasps his hands on top of his knee as he returns his eyes to the altar.

Not long after he hears Will scoff, and feels the heavy weight of Will’s eyes back on him, along with the sharpness of them, the sharpness of the doctor’s smile and his devious tongue sharpened with sarcasm.

“Are you saying that I only have myself to blame, Hannibal?”

“Yes.”

Will bursts out with a laugh that echoes clear and loud through the labyrinthic palace. Jack’s voice sounded quite out of place here, but Will’s, on the other side, sounds like it belongs here.

Will leans back on the chair with a final snort.

“Do you have any ideas for your design?” He asks, trying to make it sound uninterested so as to not push Hannibal more than he can take, but he is deeply curious, so dearly curious. Now that Will is stripped of that flimsy veil he hid under, Hannibal can tell these little moments of care he expresses. Adorable to a certain degree, caring and loving, all things considered.

Hannibal soaks on the stall air of the chapel for a moment longer, making a mental note to air it later. There’s so much the mind can do to adapt itself, and the rest comes from how well one is to tend to it.

He then rises from the chair and begins walking through the palace without looking back, knowing that Will is trailing close behind.

“When I was a young man, I spent a great time in Italy, the memories that I treasure the most from those times are the hours I spent at the Uffizi,” Hannibal comments idly and out loud, not needing to hear Will’s steps to know the younger man is close behind. He turns left and walks through one of the hallways, each window like a canvas reflecting the scenery of Florence, the outside of the Uffizi, the apartment he lived in, the bridges, and the river. “I spent most of my time sketching the same painting over and over, enchanted by it. When I wasn’t sketching I just sat in front of it for hours on end admiring it.”

They climb a pair of old stone stairs, gloomy and damp as they always were at Castle Lecter, up to the north tower. The door is made of sturdy old wood and iron, and it laughs like a witch when Hannibal pushes it open. Inside the walls are the ones of the Uffizi, cast in pitch darkness as the Primavera glows in the centre, casting its heavenly light on the bench in front of it.

When Hannibal sits, Will follows to sit at his side.

“Botticelli's *Rapto* ,” Hannibal explains, pointing his chin towards the far right of the painting in question, where Zephyrus hovers darkly and menacingly over the nymph Chloris. “I always dreamed of making my own.”

“Seems fitting,” Will agrees as he studies the painting with a tilt of his head. “Do you want to do it alone or may I offer my help?”

Hannibal considers it for a long moment. He knows the offer comes from an honest desire to see Hannibal safe as much as it is to see him fully hatched from the chrysalis he is trying to come out from. The painting in front of him shifts, the white skin of the nymph Chloris turns darker as flowers bloom from her mouth, and her blond hair turns in tandem with it from blond into thick black curls. A new painting forms in front of him, one made by his future hand into a new canvas.

“Is there any way you can get Bella’s corpse for me?” Hannibal asks as the new image takes form inside his mind, and at his side Will quickly gets up, leaning in to spare one adoring kiss at the top of Hannibal’s head.

“Of course, darlin’, leave it to me.”

[x]

The plan was actually talked about and rehearsed. There couldn’t be a doubt. Everything was meticulously planned. Will has just left to check the dogs while in truth he went to grab a syringe. Hannibal only needs to sing for his supper and entertain Jack for a couple of minutes.

There’s a chance right at this moment, for Hannibal to take a step back and return to the pantry inside his mind. Will has left, because it was what made sense; he knows where the syringe is *(he could have told Hannibal but he didn’t),* Hannibal is the better fit to make conversation *(not entirely true, Will is just as capable, it’s just that he doesn’t like it),* the dogs are not in the living room with Jack and him *(they’re with Will, because Will won’t get himself caught).*

It makes perfect sense for Will to create the perfect circumstances for Hannibal to betray him, just in case there’s the chance for it to happen, and have everything ready to defend himself if Hannibal does.

The house is also cold and empty because Will is not above manipulating his way to the outcome he wants. The dogs are nowhere to be found, supposedly for Jack’s sake. The fireplace is not lit. The food remains suitable for Hannibal’s old tastes, with not a speck of meat to be seen, smelled or tasted. The house is cold and empty, and the only conversation Hannibal has is Jack’s, because it makes perfect sense for Will to recreate the exact

circumstances of what Hannibal's life was before him, and will be if he decides to betray Will.

Cold, lonely and boring, just in case Hannibal needed a reminder.

There is, in fact, a little voice in the back of Hannibal's head, the one he has manufactured into a weirdly decent moral compass that tells him he should stop Jack's attempt at conversation and tell him about Will. The voice says *'It's what a decent man would do.'* and the voice is right.

This is a moment for Hannibal to make a choice, and one of them is plainly around him, in the shape of Jack's conversation that Hannibal doesn't bother to pay too much attention, in the shape of an empty house and an unlit fireplace. A future without Will where he clings to manufactured emotions and half-relationships without meaningful connections.

A part of Hannibal clings to it, clings to the voice he has known for so long that doesn't speak with the tilt of Will's accent. It was what he had known all his life, the only way he had learned he could fit in.

Then Jack mentions Abigail – simple as that, without Hannibal truly recalling what he was talking about, how has Abigail come into the conversation – and another voice, one that doesn't have the tilt of Will's accent either, comes to him, barreling through him. It comes suddenly, washing over him and dragging the nausea he felt once, the cold he never wants to experience again, dragging the childish rage, and the teenage mourning, and the adult loneliness.

And this time, it finds Hannibal with a knife in reach. This time he has something precious to protect, and he has the chance, and he has the means. And he will protect the daughter who has seen the same horrors as he did and the man who loves him despite all the horrors Hannibal carries within.

Hannibal makes the knife slide across Jack's throat easily, and the splash of blood that falls on his face is so blessedly warm. His body moves swiftly, the knife like an extension of himself as if it was always meant to fit between his fingers. Jack stumbles backwards, reaching for a gun he doesn't have. He collides against the table sending plates, glasses and cutlery across the floor as he tries to grab some to use as a weapon. Jack is strong, but years have taken their toll on him, the surprise is enough to give Hannibal the advantage and the lack of blood makes him slow.

Jack falls to the floor and Hannibal pierces between the ribs like he had meant to try when he was a child. The knife pierces the tender flesh like the sword had taken the head of one of the men who took Mischa from him.

Blood seeps through the wooden floorboards of Will's kitchen as the fight leaves Jack, but Hannibal can't stop. In Jack's face, he sees the faces of those men that took everything from him, and he can't stop, *won't stop.*

Will's footsteps behind him are quiet as a mouse's, but when he clicks his tongue Hannibal stops.

“Don’t mind me,” Will says cheerily as he lays the syringe over the counter.

Winston obediently sits at Will’s feet, retreating the sharp fangs as Will pets him. Unsurprising, of course. The yellow plastic suit he is wearing is not unsurprising either, but curious nonetheless. Makes sense when Hannibal thinks about it – *will* make sense when Hannibal recovers and thinks about it. About how The Copy-Cat has been able to never leave a trail.

But for now, it’s not important. Hannibal’s breath is ragged, his mind a comfortable buzzing of static as Jack’s body convulses for the last time.

“Take your time, *darlin’,”* Will coos, slowly and carefully moving behind Hannibal with premeditatedly loud steps. He rests his gloved hands on Hannibal’s shoulders, drags them softly over his arms and closes them around Hannibal’s wrists, guiding him to sink the knife again. “Take anything you need, the food will keep. And I’ll take care of everything else. Just… that’s it, good, good boy.”

Hannibal shivers under the praise, his eyes grow heavy but still focused. His hands remain perfectly still even without Will’s help.

And then there’s the sizzling of meat on the stove, the warm smell of it mixing with the iron of blood that hangs around, the sweet-spicy smell of death from Jack’s corpse as it waits for them to finish dinner.

And then there’s the smile on Will’s lips, sharp but proud. And then there’s the smile on Will’s eyes, just as proud but way more soft, and loving, and adoring.

And then Hannibal takes the first bite, and for the first time in his whole life, the hunger that has been eating at him is finally satisfied.

[x]

It’s not a surprise when the call comes. Neither is the mournful tone that wraps itself around Beverly’s voice.

“I know you’re on forced leave, Hannibal, but… we could really use your help here.”

The sight is one that Hannibal has seen plenty of times, in person and behind his eyelids. It’s one he has seen just mere hours ago, now with new details: the vibrant yellow of the police tape, the moving red and blue lights of police cars and the constant movement of the FBI.

Time and nature have taken over Bella’s body, leaving her a carcass of what she has been, but not less beautiful in death than she was in life. Flowers sprout from her mouth, and her jaw hangs slack, held only by the thin layer of skin that stubbornly remains.

In death, Jack has his last wish come true, and he holds her in his arms as they both find each other and finally can come to rest together.

“I understand now what you meant about a very *personal* crime scene, Agent Katz,” Will says, making an unnecessary whistle. Rudeness for rudeness sake.

“This resembles The Primavera, by Botticelli,” Hannibal ignores him, just as Beverly does, already both used to Will’s voluntary lack of empathy for those around him. He continues explaining: “Their positions and the overall composition of the tableaux is almost a carbon copy of Zephyrus with the nymph Chloris. I don’t think that is a coincidence the killer has unearthed Phyllis’ body without reason.”

“Why her?” Beverly asks, but Will intercedes before Hannibal can answer.

“Who would it be, if he wasn’t her? If Jack is the wind, then only she can be the Spring.” He turns to Beverly then, hands inside his pocket, putting at least a semblance of professionalism. “The theory is that The Copy-Cat killed Bella, right?”

“The only not copied tableaux of him, signed by The Copy-Cat himself,” she says, and with a shrug, she adds: “Supposedly. Do you think this is The Copy-Cat?”

“Not at all, he doesn’t have any reason to go for Jack, doesn’t fit his motivations,” Will explains, because who’s better at explaining The Copy-Cat’s motivations than the myth itself? “He likes to toy around. This would be the equivalent of purposely breaking his toys. He will grow bored eventually without Jack around, but he is not bored now. This was not him.”

What he doesn’t say is still heard, and a horrible shiver runs visibly through Beverly. It’s not a threat – it *is* a threat, but she can’t read it like one like Hannibal does. The Copy-Cat will get bored. He will kill again now that Jack is not around, and the only person that can see him it’s at his side.

Hannibal takes a deep breath as he gives his crime scene one last look, and burns it into his memory palace. Hangs a painting of it along the fresh one and Botticelli’s.

“This is a new serial killer,” Hannibal says his new life stretches before him. The wind drags the smell of death as well as the smell of Will's horrible aftershave. Life stretches with golden light, the warmth of another at his side, with the satisfaction of a belly with food and a heart full of love. “And he *will* kill again.”

"And," Will says as he slips his hand with Hannibal's, stroking his thumb tenderly. A gentle caress that Beverly reads as the support of a partner, and she lacks the clues to hear the pride in Will's voice. "I fear that whoever this is, will surpass The Copy-Cat."

Oh, what a strange and beautiful thing is to be loved.

Chapter End Notes

I really do hope the 3 months wait wasn't so terrible awful, and I hope you have your closure.

Once again, thank you so much for the support, the kudos and all the sweet comments. Lots of love. ♡

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